

Finding Yourself Through Art  
Education Students Experiences of an Arts-Based Mindfulness Group Program

by

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of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters in Social Work

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### **Abstract**

Postsecondary students' mental health is a pressing concern on campuses across the country as young adults are experiencing alarmingly high rates of stress-related challenges such as anxiety and depression. A recent report released through the Council of Ontario Universities recommends postsecondary institutions work together with mental health systems to break down silos, find collaborative solutions, and implement programs focused on building resilience. My research study explored the suitability and effectiveness of an innovative mindfulness-based intervention (MBIs) called the Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP) to teach mindfulness skills to education students. Arts-based methods are enjoyable and engaging, and enable individuals to express feelings/thoughts that might otherwise be difficult to elicit; this information is rich and interesting, even powerful. Results of qualitative thematic analysis of pre- and post-group group interviews led to the development of three main themes: (1) increased self-awareness and mindfulness, (2) benefits of arts-based methods, and (3) benefits of group work. Participation in HAP helped students mitigate the negative impacts of stress, and taught them mindfulness concepts and activities that they were inspired to introduce into their education practicum. My research demonstrates how interventions such as the HAP could make a difference in student's mental health. As MBIs may not have universal appeal they should not be a mandatory program requirement, but consideration may be given to offer mindfulness interventions as self-care options for postsecondary students.

*Keywords:* mindfulness, university students, education students, pre-service teachers, teacher presence, arts-based, group work.

### Résumé

La santé mentale des étudiants de niveau postsecondaire est une préoccupation urgente sur les campus partout au pays. En effet, les jeunes adultes font face à des taux élevés de défis liés au stress tels que l'anxiété et la dépression. Le Conseil des universités de l'Ontario a récemment publié un rapport qui recommande aux institutions postsecondaires de travailler étroitement avec les systèmes de santé mentale pour éviter les cloisonnements, pour trouver des solutions coopératives et pour mettre en place des programmes axés sur le développement de la résilience. Ma recherche explore la pertinence et l'efficacité d'une intervention novatrice fondée sur la pleine conscience qui s'intitule le programme holistique basé sur les arts. Ce dernier vise à enseigner des aptitudes de pleine conscience aux étudiants en éducation. Ces méthodes basées sur les arts sont plaisantes et exaltantes et elles permettent aux personnes d'exprimer des sentiments, des pensées qui sans elles n'auraient pas vu le jour. Ce qui en ressort est riche, intéressant voire profond. Les résultats des analyses thématiques qualitatives avant et après les entretiens de groupe nous conduisent à mettre trois thèmes en lumière : 1) Conscience de soi et pleine conscience accrues, 2) avantages des méthodes basées sur les arts et 3) avantages du travail de groupe. La participation des étudiants au programme holistique basé sur les arts a contribué à atténuer les effets négatifs du stress et leur a appris les concepts et les activités liés à la pleine conscience, concepts et activités qu'ils ont pu introduire lors de leur stage en éducation. Ma recherche montre comment les interventions telles que le programme holistique basé sur les arts peuvent améliorer grandement la santé mentale de l'étudiant. Je reconnais que les interventions basées sur la pleine conscience ne sont pas nécessairement du goût de tout le monde et, de fait, elles ne devraient pas être une exigence du programme. Cependant, il convient

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de se pencher sur l'offre d'interventions liées à la pleine conscience pour faciliter l'autogestion de la santé des étudiants de niveau postsecondaire.

*Mots-clés:* pleine conscience, étudiants universitaires, étudiants en éducation, enseignants en formation initiale, présence de l'enseignant, pratique basée sur les arts, travail de groupe.

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### **Dedication**

In memory of Norm Fournier (1960-2016) for his love, encouragement and support.

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Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.

~ Nelson Mandela

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### **Introduction**

As research exploring mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) increases, studies implementing MBIs with education students remain scarce. The study that is discussed in this thesis explored the delivery of an emerging MBI with a small group of post-secondary students in a northern Ontario university context. An emergent MBI delivered as a prevention/promotion strategy is being studied as an option to provide support for the growing mental health needs of the post-secondary student population.

This thesis is presented in four chapters. Herein I describe the background of the problem that led to this study. In the first chapter I review the more recent pertinent literature on the topic, and provide the research questions. Chapter Two offers a detailed description of the research methods, including the study design, researcher reflexivity, and the data collection and analysis. Chapter Three consists of the findings from the data analysis together with a detailed discussion. Finally, in Chapter Four, the results are summarized and I explore their implications for both the education and social work disciplines, providing recommendations for future research.

### **Background of the Problem**

In the early decades of the 21st century there have been increasing numbers of young people continuing onto post-secondary education. The number of university students in Canada has almost tripled since 1980 when there were 768,000 students (The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2011) to 2,054,943 students attending university on Canadian campuses in 2014-2015 (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Mental wellness on university campuses is a growing concern as university students reveal alarmingly high rates of stress-related challenges such as anxiety and depression (American College Health Association, 2016; Regehr, Glancy, & Pitts, 2013). A national survey

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conducted in the spring of 2016 with a survey sample comprised of 41 Canadian postsecondary institutions that included 43,780 completed surveys, found that within the previous 12 months, 44% of students reported feeling so depressed that it was difficult to function. This is an increase from 40% in 2013. Furthermore, 65% of students reported overwhelming anxiety, up from 58% in 2013. Also, 13% of students had seriously considered suicide, up from 11% in 2013 (American College Health Association, 2016). Moreover, Regehr, et al., (2013) suggested that only a limited number of students experiencing these mental health challenges access university health support services. Downs and Eisenberg (2012) cited the following four barriers to students pursuing treatment: 73% preferred dealing with their stress alone; 52% expressed the belief that stress is a normal part of university; 52% did not see their needs as serious; and 47% did not have time for treatment.

Recently, university students in southern Ontario expressed concern regarding the lack of sufficient mental health services on campus. Between October 2016 and January 2017, four University of Guelph students died by suicide. Additionally, in the early months of 2017, two students died by suicide at the University of Waterloo, and in November 2017 there were two deaths by suicide at Western University (Wong, 2017; Stacey, 2018). Three thousand Guelph students signed a petition to Stop Losing Students to Mental Illness, and a recent plebiscite held at Western University found that 90% of student voters wanted mental health services to be made a priority on their campus (Stacey, 2018). Thus, a critical issue for post-secondary academic institutions is to discover and implement effective approaches to support students' mental health and foster resiliency for the duration of their education.

Moreover, findings from the American College Health Association (2016) were highlighted in a report published on November 2, 2017, by a collaboration of the College Student

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Alliance, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, the Colleges of Ontario, and the Council of Ontario Universities (College Student Alliance, Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, Colleges Ontario, & Council of Ontario Universities, 2017). The report, *In It Together*, recommended a whole community approach to mental health (College Student Alliance et al., 2017). The College Student Alliance et al. (2017) document acknowledged that postsecondary institutions do not have the capacity to meet all the mental health needs of their students without help. Recognizing Ontario must be proactive, *In It Together* proposed universities work together with government and the province's mental health system to break down silos, find collaborative solutions, and implement programs as early as kindergarten with a focus on building resilience (College Student Alliance et al., 2017). Further, *In It Together* recommended post-secondary students be recognized as a high priority group, as 75% of mental health disorders begin between 18-24 years of age (College Student Alliance et al., 2017). Viner and Tanner (2009) suggest the high prevalence of mental health concerns in this population indicates this developmental stage may increase ones' vulnerability to conditions.

The Mental Health and Addictions Scorecard and Evaluation Framework (MHASEF) Research Team (2015) at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES) found the annual death by suicide rate for youth in Northeastern Ontario to be more than double the provincial average. Furthermore, suicide is the leading cause of death due to injury in this same region (Health Quality Ontario, 2017).

Youth led action to prioritize mental health services extends beyond post-secondary institutions as demonstrated by the Rainbow District School Board's Student Senate members (Charette, 2018). In early February 2018, this group of young leaders organized a one-day board wide conference to Stand Up for Youth Mental Health to end the stigma of mental health and

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create safe, welcoming school environments (Charette, 2018). Motivation for this event was inspired by survey results from the Student Senate's Students as Researchers initiative that found 70% of students felt significant school related stress and would either talk to a friend, or no one about this stress (Charette, 2018). The conference offered attendees information on community resources, strategies to mitigate the negative effects of stress in their lives, and tools to empower them as mental health ambassadors within their schools (Charette, 2018). Presenters at the event included representatives from the Rainbow School Board's mental health staff, Greater Sudbury Police Services, and the Sudbury and District Health Unit (Charette, 2018). Many of the youth who organized and attended this conference will be entering postsecondary institutions within the next few years; this is yet another example of the need to prioritize youth mental health services.

According to Hagen and Nayar (2014), this generation, and future generations of emerging adults, will experience increased stressors as they are met with a myriad of expectations such as performance in academics, athletics, and extracurricular activities and constant stimulation from information and communication technologies. The long-term and/or generational impact of these relatively new lifestyle changes have not yet been fully realized or understood.

Based in part on these growing concerns, my research study explored the suitability and effectiveness of a holistic arts-based group program to teach mindfulness skills to post-secondary students. Through the acquisition of skills such as paying attention, and increased self-awareness through experiential arts-based activities, I hoped that program participation might benefit students with an increased capacity to cope effectively with stressors. Different than mainstream manualized mindfulness programs, the Holistic Arts-Based program (HAP) (Coholic, Loughheed,

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& Cadell, 2009) is an emerging approach that integrates experiential mindfulness activities with arts-based methods. My research study examined HAP's benefits of increasing mindfulness-based skills as resiliency against stressors in a small group of concurrent education students at Laurentian University. I was also interested in learning if teaching education students about arts-based mindfulness would influence their practice and future teaching experiences with elementary students.

Executive functioning (including planning, organization, memory, time management, and flexible thinking), self-regulation, self-acceptance, and mindfulness are becoming more widely recognized as essential skills necessary to live a healthy and effective life, and reach one's potential (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Research in this area has increased significantly over the past few years, however the literature review demonstrates a paucity of emerging MBIs delivered specifically to education students. We understand that when students are able to acquire self-regulation, self-understanding, self-acceptance and mindfulness skills they are increasingly successful socially, academically, and they experience higher self-esteem (Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

### **Chapter One**

#### **Review of the Literature**

A literature search on mindfulness-based interventions with education students was conducted using a combination of the following terms: mindfulness, interventions, university students, education students, pre-service teachers, and teacher presence. A search of the Google Scholar database revealed the following key themes: perceived stress with students, student mental health (anxiety/fear and depression), students and mindfulness (awareness and attentions), and teacher presence. The themes identified support my research project examining



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the suitability and effectiveness of the Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP) as a prevention, promotion, and experiential training for education students. In the following sections, I will discuss the following key concepts as they pertain to my project: mindfulness, benefits of MBIs, teacher presence, mindfulness and university students, Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP), and research rationale for my project.

### **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is a holistic philosophy. Some argue that it is an awareness that emerges from the purposeful, non-judgmental, observation of experiences as they unfold (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p.144). This awareness cultivates an attitude of equanimity and patience (Kerr et al., 2017; Kabat-Zinn, 1990), and invites a gentle, kind, and loving curiosity. Moreover, researchers suggest mindfulness is a state of being in the world that promotes metacognitive awareness, decreases ruminative thinking, and enhances attentional capacities supporting improvements in the emotion regulation processes (Davis & Hayes, 2012).

The origins of mindfulness are embedded in a system of beliefs and practices taught by Buddha that are over 2500 years old (Bodhi, 2011). At the heart of this system the Four Noble Truths explain that (1) there is suffering, (2) there is the origin of suffering, (3) there is the cessation of suffering, and (4) there is the path out of suffering (Bodhi, 2011). The Fourth Noble Truths speaks to Buddha's eight-fold path, of which only one strand of this path is Right Mindfulness or Mindfulness (Bodhi, 2011). The Buddhist tradition of mindfulness is a practice that cultivates clear intentional awareness of the mind, developing insights to reduce human suffering (Bodhi, 2011). At its essence mindfulness is a psychological construct that involves the introspective observation of events as they arise and pass (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). In Kabat-Zinn's book, *Full Catastrophe Living* (1990), he explains;

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There is no God in Buddhism, which makes it an unusual religion. Buddhism is really based on reverence for a principle, embodied in a historical person known as the Buddha. As the story goes, someone approached the Buddha, who was considered a great sage and teacher, and asked him, “are you a god?” or something to that effect, to which he replied, “no, I am awake.” The essence of mindfulness practice is to work at waking up from the self-imposed half sleep of unawareness in which we are so often immersed. (p. 364-5)

Credited with pioneering the Buddhist tradition of mindfulness in mainstream Western culture, Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), originally developed the program to reduce the suffering of individuals experiencing chronic health conditions. MBSR was developed through Jon Kabat-Zinn’s Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is adapted from MBSR with tenets from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for use with adults experiencing depressive relapse (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2013). Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) such as these are evidence-based informed practices that offer training that has been shown to alleviate the negative impacts of stress and anxiety by drawing attention to thoughts and feelings, without judgement. MBIs have been shown to improve sleep, self-esteem, focus, attention, self-awareness and empathy (Kerrigan et al., 2017; Gockel, Cain, Malove, & James, 2013).

MBIs continue to evolve, addressing contemporary health issues and providing strategies to improve overall health and well-being. What remains consistent in all the existing and growing numbers of interventions is mindfulness and the importance of embodying this quality or state of being. The MBSR program engages participants in an eight week manualized program where each 2.5 - 3.5 hour session involves experiential practice and explores a different theme. There is also a one-day silent retreat (7.5 hours) during the sixth week (Santorelli, 2014). During each session group members are invited to participate in a formal 45-minute guided mindfulness practice followed by the opportunity to share their practice experience (Santorelli, 2014). Outside

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of the weekly sessions participants are also required to commit to a 45-minute per day formal home practice, as well as a brief informal home practice, six days a week for the duration of the program (Santorelli, 2014). Formal practice techniques involve an intentional practice time specifically set aside (for example 45-minutes a day) and include practices such as sitting meditation, awareness of breath, mindful walking or yoga (Meiklejohn, 2012). The informal practice of mindfulness may include more brief sitting or standing meditations (5-minutes or less), and the integration of mindful awareness into activities of daily life such as washing dishes, eating, brushing teeth or taking a shower.

Researchers suggest that MBIs be delivered by professional facilitators who are themselves mindfulness practitioners (Crane & Hecht, 2018; Kabat-Zinn et al., 2017). According to the Principles and Professional Standards of MBSR, MBIs are not simply the systematic delivery of tools and strategies but the cultivation of a practice designed to support the navigation of life's challenges. Therefore, it is recommended that qualified facilitators delivering MBIs, at a minimum, have a personal practice with professional experience that embodies mindfulness to effectively guide and support participants' experiences of the practice (Santorelli, 2014).

### **Benefits of MBIs**

Nascent research over the past few decades has confirmed participation in MBIs such as MBSR may lead to improvements in mental health (Hölzel et al., 2011, Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004; Carmody et al., 2009). MBIs with adult populations have been shown to improve sleep, self-esteem, focus, attention, self-awareness, and empathy (Kerrigan et al., 2017; Gockel, Cain, Malove, & James, 2013). MBIs continue to evolve, addressing contemporary health issues and providing strategies to improve overall health and well-being

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(Grossman et al., 2004; Carmody et al., 2009). Over the last decade research into the mechanisms of change behind the myriad of benefits from participation in MBIs are being explored. Findings from a controlled longitudinal study investigating changes in brain gray matter due to participation in an MBSR program, confirmed increases within the “left hippocampus, the posterior cingulate cortex, the temporo-parietal junction, and the cerebellum” (Hölzel et al., 2011, p.36). These increases in brain grey matter after participation in a MBSR program suggest benefits that could include enduring structural changes in the brain resulting in improved mental functioning in areas such as knowledge acquisition, memory, and emotion regulation (Hölzel et al., 2011).

According to Gallant’s (2016) systematic review, benefits from mindfulness meditation impact three specific domains of executive functioning (EF) brain processes. These include (1) inhibition that actively suppresses activities unimportant to the task at hand, (2) updating, differentiating, and including relevant information from working memory, and (3) shifting, which is the ability to switch attention between mental operations.

More recently, research has shown the delivery of MBIs to youth populations has resulted in positive outcomes that include increased mindfulness (Ames, 2014; Bogels, 2008; Bluth 2016a, 2016b; Edwards, 2014; Jee, 2015; Tan, 2015); self-awareness and self-regulation (Wisner, 2016); emotion regulation (Fung, 2016; Lougheed, 2016); self-compassion (Bluth, 2016b; Edwards, 2015); and self-esteem and acceptance (Tan, 2015). MBIs with youth have led to improvements in quality of life (Ames, 2014); social connectedness and peer relations (Haydicky, 2015); well-being (Bennett, 2016; Jee, 2015); optimism and sleep hygiene (Lougheed, 2016); confidence in fostering positive relationships (Wisner, 2016); personal goal achievement and happiness (Bogels, 2008); and academic achievement (Bennett, 2016).

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Additionally, youth participants have demonstrated reductions in anxiety (Ames, 2014; Bluth, 2016a; Jee, 2015; Tan 2015); depression (Ames, 2014; Bluth, 2016a; Edwards, 2014; Raes, 2013; Tan 2015); rumination (Ames, 2014); perceived stress (Bluth, 2016a; Tan 2015; Edwards 2014); internalizing and externalizing problem behaviours (Bogels, 2008; Fung, 2016), inattentiveness (Bogels, 2008; Haydicky, 2015); and behavioural difficulties (Haydicky 2015). Youth MBI participants reported experiences of personal growth, empowerment (Wisner, 2016), and acceptance within a group of their peers (Lougheed, 2016). These findings support the need for ongoing rigorous research methods exploring study design features and the impact of MBIs on youth populations.

All this being said, some researchers such as Dam et al. (2018) caution the multitude of MBI benefits may be inflated, and suggest more rigorous research is recommended.

Additionally, it should be noted that there may be contraindications to mindfulness meditation for participants with certain mental health issues. As such, screening is encouraged for conditions such as acute psychosis, mania, and suicidality (Dam et al., 2018). However, emergent research (Langer, et al., 2016; Shonin, Gordon & Griffiths, 2014) also indicated potential benefits of MBIs to these populations, therefore, options to either exclude or provide additional supports to these populations should be considered.

### **Teacher Presence**

The thought manifests the word,  
The word manifests as the deed,  
The deed develops into habit,  
And the habit hardens into character.  
So, watch the thought

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And its ways with care,

And let it spring from love

Born out of respect for all beings.

— Buddhist poem (source unknown) (Miller, 2007, p. 191).

Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) described engaged relationships between students and teachers: Teacher presence can be described as an authentic, open, attentive, and flexible awareness of both the self and the collective in context of the learning environment, and the ability to respond with patience, consideration, and compassion. Teachers who cultivate presence remain open and receptive in their classrooms, and are available to embrace the ebb and flow of their students' changing needs. They are focused on the dynamic interactions and not caught up in the planning or ruminating processes of their mind.

Some have suggested that teacher efficacy is significantly enhanced when full attention is directed to the teaching experience (Miller, 2007). Miller (2007) argued the importance of presence is frequently overlooked in teacher education (p.191). Furthermore, Miller (2007) proposed cultivating a mindfulness practice as an effective method to develop teacher presence. According to Soloway's (2016) chapter on the value of mindfulness training for pre-service teachers, the significance of teacher presence is immense as the most meaningful learning occurs when the teacher's presence ignites student's interest (p. 202). Teacher education is mandated to prepare pre-service teachers with tools and skills to enable them to continuously grow and develop as a person and a professional (Soloway, 2016). Soloway (2016) speaks to integrating training within pre-service teachers' curriculum teaching them how to cultivate present moment awareness and embody it into every lesson, and all their interactions not only with students but with colleagues, administration, and families.

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Soloway (2016) also proposed effective teacher disposition as fundamental to teacher education. Disposition is described in terms of ‘habits of the mind’ that repeatedly affect actions and judgement. Teacher disposition impacts the way teachers adapt to the constantly changing environment in their classrooms and schools. Disposition is their professional values, attitudes, and beliefs that actively support student development as well as the larger school community (Soloway, 2016).

Teachers require skills to navigate their increasingly complex and diverse classroom environments. Soloway (2016) examined the value of providing pre-service teachers with Mindfulness-Based Wellness Education (MBWE) as part of their initial teacher education. Credentials for education professors are examined as Soloway (2016) invites an exploration into the myriad of experience and knowledge required to educate teachers. Solomon (2016) reminded us that it is a teacher’s presence that serves to ignite the student’s curiosity, facilitating the most meaningful learning. As the well-known poet Maya Angelou said, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel” (Angelou, 2016).

Similar to the concept of teacher presence, a therapeutic presence is the capacity of a psychotherapist to cultivate an open, receptive awareness that facilitates a therapeutic alliance by attuning with compassion and empathy to the unfolding of the therapeutic encounter (Geller, 2017). The essence of this foundational relationship nurtures a trust that invites vulnerable and authentic dialogue in an effort to support effective therapy (Geller, 2017). Geller (2017) suggested this process begins with a therapist’s commitment to cultivate presence in their own lives.

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Teacher presence and therapeutic presence both necessitate the professional to come to the experience, with one's whole self, fully open to their students/clients, receptive to whatever arises during their interaction, and open to the landscape of their own inner wisdom and experience. These processes of presence for students/clients establishes a safe environment where deep and meaningful learning/healing can begin.

### **Mindfulness and University Students**

There are several research studies analyzing the impact of delivering MBIs to university students, with a small number of these studies specifically exploring the delivery of these interventions to education students. Researchers argued the growing rate of mental health concerns in emerging adults necessitates exploration into effective strategies to help mitigate the negative impacts of stress often experienced by the pressure of this demanding time (College Student Alliance et al., 2017). Outcomes from this literature review demonstrated many positive results from delivery of MBIs to this population such as reductions in perceived stress, distress and anxiety, and increases in wellbeing, awareness, attention, and mindfulness (Lynch, Gander, Kohls, Kudielka, and Walach, 2011; de Bruin, Meppelink, and Bogels, 2014; Galante et al., 2018; Kerr, et al., 2017).

Gockel, Cain, Malove, and James (2013) conducted an exploratory study with graduate social work students to determine if training in mindfulness would enrich their clinical skills. The students were invited to participate in an assessment of the foundations class, blinded to the more specific goal which was mindfulness training. The mindfulness training, based on the MBSR structure, was modified and adapted to work with, and support, the existing social work class curriculum. The adaptation integrated mindfulness into two of seven existing foundations of counselling classes, with 10 minutes of formal mindfulness training, followed by five minutes



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of discussion. Follow up interviews were conducted several months after the courses had finished, while students were in their field placements, to ascertain if the mindfulness strategies cultivated in foundations class were being applied. Feedback from the students reinforced mindfulness training as beneficial for both their classroom learning and their field placement work. Results from integrating mindfulness training into the curriculum suggested students experienced reduced anxiety, improved attention and focus, and increased self-awareness and acceptance.

Another study with social work students explored the delivery of a brief mindfulness practice within the social work classroom (Thomas, 2017). This concurrent mixed method research study examined the impact of incorporating mindfulness as part of an undergraduate social work interventions class. These classes were comprised of 14-17 students learning various social work techniques through a variety of teaching approaches including video recording simulated interventions, video review, discussions, and experiential in-class activities. Over the semester, brief mindfulness defined as 10 minutes per week, was facilitated during 10 of the 16 classes. The control group attended the same course led by another instructor with no mindfulness education. No statistically significant difference was found between-group in the quantitative measures that examined mindfulness, emotion regulation, and empathy. One notable between-group difference in the qualitative findings was students in the intervention group valued the experience of video recordings and video review, and they communicated feeling safe and supported in their classroom during these vulnerable activities. Thus, results from the qualitative interview questions suggested overall reductions in anxiety and judgement, and increases in presence and feeling safe within the class (Thomas, 2017).

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According to Lynch, et al., (2011) participation in a non-randomized pilot evaluation called Mindfulness-Based Coping with University Life (MBCUL) provided participants with positive mental health outcomes (Lynch et al., 2011). MBCUL, modeled closely after MBSR, was delivered by mindfulness practitioners and modified to meet the specific needs of university students (Lynch et al., 2011). The program offered shorter sessions, relevant themes, and shorter periods of meditation (Lynch et al., 2011). Despite modifications to make the program more accessible, the study's challenges included an initial high rate of attrition. However, outcomes from participants who completed the intervention demonstrated a significant reduction in perceived stress and anxiety, and an increase in mindfulness (Lynch et al., 2011).

de Bruin et al., (2014) conducted a study at University of Amsterdam with international students evaluating the awareness and attention in university students attending a mindfulness university course for credit. Researchers found that participation in seven 2-hour classes once a week, teaching the history and current application of mindfulness, and a three-minute experiential mindfulness practice, two or three times per week, resulted in increased levels of mindfulness (de Bruin et al., 2014). Findings from delivery of this mindfulness university course suggest consistent, brief mindfulness practice may result in increased awareness and attention (de Bruin et al., 2014).

A study conducted by Galante et al. (2018) at Cambridge University found university students' participation in an eight-week mindfulness intervention delivered prior to exams helped to reduce distress and enhance wellbeing. Findings and the discussion by the study's authors suggest schools are fundamental environments for personal growth and as such are significantly underutilized in providing opportunities to cultivate student's mental wellness (Galante et al., 2018).

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Regarding research with education students, a recent exploratory investigation with pre-service teachers sought to ascertain if mindfulness training would prove beneficial (Kerr, et al., 2017). A quantitative controlled research design was used to measure the impact of participation in a 6-week Learning 2 BREATHE (L2B) mindfulness curriculum with ten pre-service teachers, and compared data collected from thirteen pre-service teachers not receiving the training (Kerr, et al., 2017). According to Kerr et al. (2017) results suggest little statistical significance, however, the L2B group means were primarily in the expected direction, with reported improvements in managing negative emotions and improved emotional clarity. Moreover, Kerr et al. (2017) believe the short duration of the program and/or participants' newness to mindfulness as possible mitigating factors. Feedback from participants reveal L2B was beneficial in reducing the negative effects of stress helping them feel less overwhelmed, and some even continued to use the learned methods to help manage stress in their daily lives (Kerr, et al., 2017). The authors recommended further research with larger sample sizes to support these findings (Kerr, et al., 2017).

This summary of current research into the delivery of MBIs with university students suggests promising benefits with no negative effects. Where attrition has been aforementioned as a concern with regards to the efficacy of MBIs, I propose HAP as an emergent approach, may help reduce rates of attrition as it is often regarded as fun and engaging, which are not adjectives frequently used to describe mainstream MBIs. Moreover, screening criteria for exclusion is a fundamental part of the MBSR program structure and can eliminate individuals who could most benefit from the intervention. Further, achievement motivated post-secondary students, or those overwhelmed by coursework, may not voluntarily elect to participate in optional interventions. Therefore, integrating MBIs into the course curriculum for credit, as in de Bruin et al., (2014),

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may lead to increased participation and reduce or even eliminate attrition. To avoid potential ethical issues, it would be important to be explicit about the integration of the MBI in the description of the course content, and to incorporate some education exploring the origin of mindfulness into the course. Mindfulness should be a voluntary practice offered to potential practitioners as an invitation. As such, opportunities to engage in only the academic aspect of the course and not the experiential elements, could also be made available. Finally, findings from this snapshot of MBIs for university students suggested more rigorous research is required to determine what constitutes an effective MBI as evidence is inconsistent with regards to design, length, duration, and frequency for maximum engagement and accuracy of benefits.

During my own teacher education, I took a holistic education elective course for credit where our professor engaged us in a guided sitting practice at the start of each class, and we were required to maintain a journal of our home practice. This early introduction to formal mindfulness was perhaps the inspiration of my curiosity and motivation to nurture and cultivate my own practice. Interestingly, this initial experience was rather convoluted as I found the practice of group meditation supportive and beneficial while the components of home practice and journaling were extremely challenging. When I sat in formal practice at home I experienced significant self-judgement which led to increasingly negative experiences of the formal sitting. Authentic, vulnerable early journal entries became increasingly contrived as I sat for shorter and shorter durations and struggled with my busy, judging mind. Although I had embraced the concepts, I had not arrived at a place in my life where I could truly be present for any extended period. It has taken years of formal and informal practice and ongoing education for me to become keenly aware of my lack of awareness. In fact, what I've discovered since my teacher education is a deep sense of gratitude for the planting of the seeds of the practice.

### **Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP)**

Mindfulness with children and youth has become an emergent field of research over the past several years. Coholic (2011) demonstrated the feasibility and acceptability of a mindfulness arts-based group program with children and youth involved with child welfare services and/or the mental health system. The Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP) delivers mindfulness concepts using arts-based and experiential methods, in a safe cohesive group environment where participants engage in fun activities, enjoy snacks, and create friendships. As indicated on the HAP conceptual map (see Appendix A), program goals consist of (1) the clear purposeful facilitation of mindfulness concepts, (2) cultivating self-awareness and self-expression, (3) fostering self-compassion and empathy, and (4) identifying and encouraging personal strengths (Coholic, 2016). HAP offers a strength-based approach that emphasizes self-determination, focusing on illuminating and bolstering an individual's strengths (Coholic, 2016).

According to Coholic (2016), arts-based methods are fun and engaging, and enable individuals to access information that might otherwise be difficult to elicit; the information is rich and interesting, even powerful. Arts-based methods are holistic and strengths-based, and as such can be spiritual, emotional, and an effective outlet for self-expression and communication. Coholic (2016) found utilizing an arts-based approach may also help reduce the power differential between practitioners and clients. Arts-based methods differ from traditional MBIs, as they do not require extended periods of seated meditation or commitment to a home practice although it is hoped that participants will practice and apply what they are learning outside of the group experience. The arts-based methods offer participants creative opportunities for self-discovery and expression (Van Lith, Schofield, & Fenner, 2013). Using arts-based methods to

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teach mindfulness concepts invites a more flexible approach to learning mindfulness (Coholic, 2011).

Arts-based activities used in the HAP program include drawing, painting, creative writing, collages, working with sand, modelling clay, cutting and pasting, Tai Chi movements, and guided mindfulness meditations (Coholic, Oystriick, Posteraro, & Loughed, 2016). Arts-based methods are different than traditional art therapy as they don't require a formally trained art therapist, and the art is neither analyzed or interpreted (Loughed, 2016). Instead the art is used for self-expression and as non-verbal communication. After the creations are completed, the process and outcomes are explored collaboratively with participants to gain insight, understanding, and deeper meaning (Loughed, 2016). The use of arts-based methods invites a different way of knowing (McNiff, 2007). McNiff (2007) suggested arts-based methods invite a "larger spectrum of creative intelligence and communication, generating important information that often feels more accurate, original, and intelligent than more conventional descriptions" (p.30). According to McNiff (2007) arts-based methods employ the artistic process, free from judgment, to explore and understand experiences that stretch conventional process.

The group work component of the program promotes normalization, connection and belonging, offering participants a supportive, non-judgmental environment among peers (Coholic, 2016). Moreover, the peer component of group work offers a valuable supportive environment that encourages acceptance and provides a platform for collaborative problems solving (Malekoff, 2015). Unique to peer groups, individuals may nudge, challenge, and encourage each other beyond the capacity of any facilitator (Malekoff, 2015). Group work involves inviting the whole individual to the group with a focus on emphasizing and building personal strengths (Malekoff, 2015). All groups are inimitable and belong to their members, and

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group becomes a place where they feel a sense of belonging and can safely learn to effectively navigate their social interactions (Malekoff, 2015). Social group work encourages interconnectedness demonstrating how our actions impact others, and fosters collaborative environments working with others toward a common goal. Furthermore, the application of experiential learning within the group context provides direct, hands-on experiences that engage members, provide exposure to shared, meaningful learning, and provide opportunities for reflection that may result in increased knowledge and skills development (Norton et al., 2014).

The HAP has shown promise as a fun and engaging approach to teaching mindfulness concepts, making them increasingly accessible to diverse populations. The use of this emerging approach with education students may reduce attrition due to the fun and engaging nature of the program, which may also support the development of skills to help students mitigate the negative effects of stress. Past studies have shown that the benefits of participation in the program consist of improved emotion regulation and social and coping skills, and increased self-awareness and self-esteem (Coholic, 2011).

Integration of mindfulness into education seems a natural fit. Teachers' roles are multifaceted; they are required to educate, mediate, model, coach, and support, while providing safety and guidance, but are often plagued with limited resources for their diverse and ever changing classrooms (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). The implementation of HAP with pre-service teachers explores participation benefits for education students who may, as teachers, become mindfulness facilitators with their students.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

Although mindfulness training in the education of teachers has been evaluated, there remains significant gaps in the research. There may also be a basic lack of understanding as to

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how mindfulness interventions may help mitigate negative effects of stress. Furthermore, as there appears to be considerable attrition in many mainstream manualized programs, it would be beneficial to explore emerging approaches such as arts-based methods to help determine what might best serve to engage and motivate university students' attendance. Finally, current research remains limited in terms of a northern Ontario context where there are persistent inequities in healthcare services and health outcomes when compared with the rest of the Province. According to CMHA (2014), northern Ontarians face the highest rates of hospitalization for mental health but have access to fewer mental health services and supports than the rest of the Province. This rationale further supports the significance of this exploration into the benefits of an arts-based mindfulness group program for education students within this geographical area.

Findings from the literature review suggest that programs like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) or adaptations based on the MBSR format have had successful outcomes with university student populations. Outcomes from these studies demonstrated reduced anxiety and judgement, improved attention and focus, and increased self-awareness, acceptance, wellbeing, self-efficacy, self-regulation, self-compassion, presence, feeling of safety within their class, and improved quality of sleep (Frank, Reibel, Broderick, Cantrell, & Metz, 2015; Emerson et al., 2017; Gockel et al., 2013; Thomas, 2017). Results of MBIs with university students show promise as they demonstrate positive outcomes in alignment with the data from other adult populations.

### **Research Questions**

Dr. Diana Coholic and colleagues originally developed HAP to help build self-regulation and resiliency skills in vulnerable youth in care. I believed that through this experiential learning, pre-service teachers would actively engage in fun interactive activities that could help them



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effectively manage their own stress while gaining knowledge of mindfulness concepts and competencies on implementing arts-based mindfulness activities in their classrooms.

The purpose of this research study is to answer the questions:

- 1) Does participation in a 12-week mindfulness arts-based group program improve education students' skills in mindfulness, and change their perceptions of the stress they are experiencing?
- 2) What are their experiences in HAP?

### **Conclusion**

In summary, this literature review clarifies the concepts of mindfulness and teacher presence, explores current research into MBIs with an emphasis on the impact with university students, more specifically education students. Additionally, the Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP) is described to establish support for the exigency of this study. The next chapter on methodology will provide a synopsis of my background, in conjunction with details of the methodology, setting, target population, recruitment methods, participant details, data analysis techniques, ethical considerations, validation methods, and emergent themes presented in my thesis.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Research Methodology**

The following chapter describes details of the study's theoretical framework, research strategy, and data analysis techniques. Researcher reflexivity is shared to offer transparency concerning background and potential biases. Personal reflections are synthesized and shared to demonstrate critical reflection of the relation between the participants and I through experiences, learning, and approach to facilitation. The study setting, target population, recruitment process,

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participants and ethical considerations are revealed, and validation methods are explicated to support findings. Thematic analysis of pre- and post-semi-structured group interviews led to the development of three main themes. The themes are: (1) increased self-awareness and mindfulness, (2) benefits of arts-based methods, and (3) benefits of group work.

### **Study Design**

Social constructivism is the theoretical framework of this study. This framework recognizes the complexities of our world and in doing so acknowledges there is no single reality. Truth and meaning are socially and culturally constructed. Individuals create meaning through their interactions (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, insight was gained through the exploration and interpretation of individuals' perspectives

The research design employed was mixed methods that includes qualitative and quantitative data gathering techniques (Creswell, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggest qualitative research may be defined as, "A situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world" (p. 3). According to Bryman, Bell, and Teevan (2012), quantitative research primarily utilizes a deductive approach to test theory through the collection of numbers and statistics to analyze data through an objective ontological orientation often influenced by the natural science model of positivism. The purpose of applying a mixed methods approach in this research study was to employ validation strategies to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the study results

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(Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) recommended mixed methods as a way for one method to inform the other expanding the related field of inquiry.

Subjective participant perceptions as well as objective reality were considered as the education students completed measures and described their experiences of participation in the program (Bryman, Bell, & Teevan, 2012). I did not want to limit the focus of exploration, but extrapolate as much information as possible from study participants' overall experiences. This mixed method approach allowed for triangulation and helped me procure a comprehensive analysis of the findings. Perspectives of the program both as an intervention to help mitigate the negative impacts of stress, as well as training in arts-based mindfulness activities to implement in the teaching environment were explored in the group interviews.

### **Setting**

Facilitation of the HAP was in the Multidisciplinary Qualitative Research Laboratory (MQRL), at Laurentian University. This site allowed students to remain on campus while accessing the program. The MQRL holds all the equipment and supplies required for the study, as it is the primary location of Dr. Coholic's research and offers adequate space to conduct group work and interviews.

### **Recruitment**

Convenience sampling was employed for participant selection as the research study was proposed to Laurentian University education students at the end of their final class of the 2016 academic year. The Director of the School of Education, Dr. Patrice Milewski, and Education Department Faculty member, Ms. Carolyn Crang, were agreeable and supportive in allowing me access to recruit students to participate in the research project. First, HAP was described to education students in three five-minute presentations at the conclusion of their year-end classes

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to assess whether there was enough interest amongst these students to proceed with the research study. After this brief presentation, students interested in participating were invited to record their name and email address on a sign-up form located at the front of their class. The prospective candidates were given a detailed hand out with information pertaining to the arts-based mindfulness group program (see Appendix B) and advised that they would be contacted when more specific details regarding the precise dates and times of program delivery were determined. No limit to the number of education students invited to sign up was established as it was determined that participant interest/availability were subject to change once the date and time were finalized in the early fall of 2016. A total of 64 concurrent education students comprised of 30 entering second year, 14 entering third year, and 20 entering their fourth year expressed an interest in participating in the HAP. In August 2016, emails were sent to all 64 students who signed up informing them that they may participate in HAP as part of a research study if they choose to do so by emailing me regarding their continued interest I contacted interested students with proposed dates and times for the two groups (see Appendix C).

Recruitment efforts led to the formation of two cohorts with five participants in each, and sessions began the week of September 19, 2016. Two additional university students, not part of the concurrent education program, joined the groups as requested by the thesis supervisor generating two groups of six participants each (one non-education student in each group).

The groups were co-facilitated by me with support from two female student research assistants (RAs). The RAs were fourth year BSW students being trained to facilitate the HAP, and one was assigned to each group by my first thesis supervisor.

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### **Participants**

The current study applied a mixed methods approach to explore the benefits of a 12-week arts-based mindfulness group program (Holistic Arts-Based Program; HAP) with education students enrolled in the English-language concurrent Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program at Laurentian University. Students invited to participate included any Laurentian University Education students enrolled in the English-language concurrent Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) Program. There were no exclusionary criteria to disqualify prospective subjects from inclusion in the study within the established target population.

What follows is an explanation of the student pseudonyms, a description of the student participants and groups, and reasons for participation. Pseudonyms were selected using a web-based visualization of historical trends in baby naming applet, Baby Name Voyager. Each participant's pseudonym was selected using the first initial of his or her first name and matched with a name that held similar ranking in popularity based on the participant's year of birth. The students are identified as Alison, Addison, Alicia, Ariana, Morgan, Kasey, Ciara, Cassandra, Sienna, Erin, Kevin, and Kathryn. There were 12 students who chose to participate in this study. Of the 12 students, 11 were female and one was male. Initially 10 concurrent education students registered for this study and ranged in age from 18 to 21 years old with a mean age of 20 years. Due to issues around timing of the post-group interviews and attrition, complete data was only collected from six of the original 10 participants.

As mentioned above, two additional, non-education students (in addition to the 10 concurrent education participants) participated in the study. Kasey, a Laurentian University graduate student attended the HAP research study to learn the program as training, to support her thesis, and prepare her to co-facilitate Dr. Coholic's youth HAP groups. Erin, another non-

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education student enrolled in the Bachelor of Psychology program at Laurentian University, attended the HAP having expressed a keen interest in art therapy with potential for future work co-facilitating Dr. Coholic's youth HAP groups.

The HAP was delivered to two groups of university students. Group one was held from 1pm-3pm on Tuesdays and consisted of six students who identified as female, Alison, Addison, Alicia, Arianna, Morgan and Kasey. Five of these participants were education students and one was a graduate student. Of the education students, three were in their fourth year, one was in her third year, and one was in her second year. From the first session group one, participants seemed to connect and it was not long before the students became a cohesive unit with most participants attending session every week. The lowest number of sessions attended by a group member from group one was 10 sessions.

Group two was held from 10am-12pm on Wednesdays and consisted of five education students and one psychology student. The group was comprised of three fourth year education students, and two second year education students. Five identified as female, Kathryn, Cassandra, Ciara, Sienna and Erin, and one identified as male, Kevin. Only three participants, Cassandra, Ciara, and Sienna, attended the pre-group interview while a fourth, Kathryn, arrived after the interview, just in time for the first session. Of the initial six who began the program, Kathryn only attended the first session. After several attempts to correspond via email, I received notification and an apology from her explaining she was withdrawing from the program due to her involvement in an excess of extracurricular activities. She did express having enjoyed the session she attended, but felt attending the HAP would be one thing too many in her already busy schedule. Kevin only attended four of the 12 sessions therefore not completing the program, and this was also the case with the Erin, the psychology student, who only attended five of the 12

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sessions. Finally, Alicia from group one and Sienna from group two both missed the post-group interview due to end of semester conflicts and did not respond to requests to reschedule for another date. After several unsuccessful attempts to collect post-group data from these two participants, we concluded the study with completed data from seven female participants in total.

When I tried to arrange an alternate time for them to complete the measures and participate in a one-on-one follow up interview neither responded. After careful reflection, I realized that consideration of the timing for program delivery is essential. I think that concluding sessions at the end of semester, during exam time, and just prior to Christmas break proved problematic for complete data collection.

The education students attributed stressors as the primary motive behind their decision to participate in the HAP. Examples of these stressors included self-imposed/limiting thoughts, self-judgments, finances, academics, lack of a social life, too much of a social life, work, lack of employment, prioritizing others, procrastination, poor time management, lack of balance, demands from professors, and demands from parents. Other motives students offered for their participation in the study consisted of learning mindfulness skills and concepts to bring into the classroom, and an opportunity to enhance employability.

### **Procedure: HAP Facilitation**

Two concurrent HAP cohorts allowed for increased generalizability of findings through program replication (Kukull & Ganguli, 2012). In order to maintain the integrity of program delivery and allow for increased internal validity I facilitated both of these groups (Horner, Rew & Torres, 2006). Students were required to commit to two-hours per week for 12 weeks as well as participate in two group interviews and complete two quantitative measures both pre- and post-group.

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The HAP follows a standardized curriculum created by Dr. Coholic and members of her research team. The HAP session format begins with a game or icebreaker activity, which is followed by a mindfulness activity and then an arts-based method. Halfway through each session food is provided during a 15-minute break. The second half includes another mindfulness activity, a group cohesion activity before concluding the session with a closing activity. All activities are strengths-based. This format is directly based on Dr. Coholic's manualized program, which was followed for the full duration of the study (Coholic, 2019).

Activities used in the Holistic Arts-Based Program are designed to teach participants mindfulness concepts. For example, the Thoughts Jar is used to teach the concept of mindfulness. It demonstrates what our minds look like when we are overly stressed or feeling anxious. We use a clear jar, half filled with water, and pass it around the circle of participants who are each invited to indicate a thought or feeling represented by beads, and dropping these colourful beads, one at a time into the jar. Once everyone has had a turn the lid is secured and the jar with beads is shaken. While all the beads are swirling around in the agitated water, participants are asked if they think they could make good decisions if their thoughts and emotions in their minds, looked like the beads swirling around in the jar. Then, once the jar is set down on the table and the beads settle to the top or bottom of the jar, the concept of mindfulness is discussed. The thoughts and feelings are still present, in the jar of water, but they are easier to identify and focus on when they are settled. This experiential exercise offers participants a chance to discuss how mindfulness can be an effective strategy to help them settle their thoughts and emotions so that they can make better decisions. See Appendix D for a one page handout describing this activity. Another arts-based activity, Me as a Tree, is a non-threatening self-exploration used to increase self-awareness and build group cohesion, participants are invited to



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draw themselves as a tree. Once complete, this drawing is shared with the other group members inviting non-judgmental inquiry into their creative pieces. See Appendix E for a one page handout describing this activity. For an illustrated HAP session structure and more examples of activities see Appendix F.

### **Researcher Reflexivity**

Interpretations are fundamentally personal in nature. Consequently, culture, social class, gender, and occupation play critical roles in an individual's understanding of the world (Creswell, 2013). Due to the subjective nature of the social constructivist framework, being explicit concerning the background of the researcher is critical so that the interpretation can be accurately assessed. Moreover, in applying researcher reflexivity, I considered inherent biases and assumptions that impacted my research at its foundation (Walsh & Downe, 2006). Choices made prior to, and throughout, the research study were filtered through my personal identity. According to Walsh and Downe (2006) by acknowledging the influence of my preconceptions, the research process is improved through a heightened level of transparency linking the work with its influences.

I am a spiritual non-religious Jewish female currently in the process of completing the Master of Social Work Program at Laurentian University. I spent much of my early career employed in finance pursuing opportunities that offered economic stability. Once an opportunity to resume my education materialized I enthusiastically pursued schooling, with a concentration on educating the whole child. Employed as a teacher, I promptly recognized that I lacked fundamental social work skills necessary to adequately support my students. I enrolled in the School of Social Work at Laurentian University where my passion was ignited. As a result, I continued on to graduate studies in the field of social work with a focus on mindfulness and

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holistic education. According to Finlay (2008) self-disclosure serves as foundational understanding of the relationship between the researcher and researched by providing a background and context which situates the researcher in their current location.

As a graduate student, under the direct supervision of Dr. Diana Coholic, I have been given the unique opportunity to facilitate the HAP with youth. As part of my own research, I scheduled time to reflect on and summarize each HAP session and thoughts and feelings that emerged (Finlay & Gough, 2008) and I deliberated on these reflections with a colleague. I explored reflexivity as an intersubjective reflection (Finlay & Gough, 2008). This allowed me to critically consider the relation between the participants and I through the questions posed and answers explored. Reflexivity examines the effect of the researcher on the research and the research on the researcher. Conscious experience of the self as student and researcher is arguably particularly important to acknowledge during the preliminary phase of post-graduate studies. As we embark on learning how to conduct and report on our own research, while in this case leading and facilitating program delivery (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Prior to delivering the HAP for my research study, I gained experience facilitating Dr. Coholic's arts-based mindfulness group program with youth in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Program (CAMPH) at Health Sciences North. I continued to deliver the HAP in the MQRL at Laurentian University as part of a three-year project (funded by SSHRC) for youth aged 11-17 years who are experiencing challenges with schooling. As being a mindfulness practitioner is generally a requirement for facilitating MBIs, I believe it is important to describe my personal experience with mindfulness. I have been actively practicing yoga, the art of moving mindfulness meditation, for over 14 years as a trained and registered yoga instructor with Yoga Alliance. I also maintain a formal daily mindfulness meditation practice, which began

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during my instructor training for Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) in October of 2014. I recognize that my personal experience with, and dedication to, the practice of mindfulness has a direct impact on the research (Finlay & Gough, 2008). In addition, due to challenging life circumstances over the past few years I have become increasingly self-reflective in my educational pursuits. I support social justice movements and maintain criticism of Canada's antiquated institutions, governing bodies, and inequities.

Denzin and Lincoln (2018) clarify that writing within research is a process of self and subject discovery. This suggested that as much as I am exploring the impact of participation in the HAP on post-secondary students, I am simultaneously embarking on a personal exploration to reveal my contributions to the research and how my pre-existing self has influenced the research processes. Not only do we bring ourselves to the research experience, we also create ourselves and occupy numerous roles within the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Our lived experience inherently has influence over our research, from the questions that frame our research to what we focus on in our analysis of the data and findings (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas, & Caricativo, 2017). As such, I believe it is important to be vulnerable and authentic in reflexivity statements to provide transparency, as suggested earlier in an effort to improve the quality of the research.

In the first year of my graduate studies, I was offered a project lead opportunity to organize a suicide postvention conference for community-based youth service providers. Ironically, on the day of the conference, upon its conclusion, I was ushered by a colleague into the crisis room I'd arranged, and informed by police, who had just attended the conference, that my common-law partner had died by suicide. Furthermore, my pre-teen daughter had been the one to discover his deceased body when she arrived home from school. Following the death

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notification, police were dispatched to pick up my teenage son to ensure he would be supported when he learned of our tragic unanticipated loss. This trauma plagued the first year of my graduate studies, as I tried to navigate the complicated loss of a loved one to suicide. This loss involved grief and guilt, support for my adolescent daughters' healing, and efforts to reconcile my relationship with my disheartened son who expressed feelings of betrayal. The sense of personal responsibility led to overpowering feelings of blame, shame, and self-judgment as I fought relentless tsunami-like waves of self-condemning thoughts and emotions. My identity was forever shifted as a result of this experience and the subsequent fallout. It is through this lens that I formulate my worldview and the perspective that sets the foundation of this research study. Connection, purpose and belonging have become essential central themes in my post suicide-loss life. As a facilitator, the HAP offered me valuable tools for healing, particularly on days when my formal mindfulness practice was besieged with relentless deleterious cognitions. In the days and weeks after our tragic loss, program delivery provided me with a healing refuge demanding my full presence, and it provided a temporary reprieve from negative thinking. I believe this traumatic life experience revealed the powerful healing components within the HAP. The art-based program offered me a light in the darkness, a bridge between my living nightmare and my more formal impracticable mindfulness meditation practice. This experience reinforced the benefits of mindfulness and the necessity of an accessible practice during difficult times. As much as we are researchers we are also experimenting with our own stories (Denzin & Lincoln).

During my time as a graduate student, I have endured both the normal stressors of university life and the devastation of suicide loss. Throughout it all I have found mindfulness to be not only a valuable practice but a necessary way of being in the world. As such, I maintain a strong personal interest in the delivery of mindfulness interventions to help university students

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navigate the difficult balance between their academic and non-academic lives. Furthermore, as the mother of two adolescent children who will soon be attending university, I have an added interest in integrating evidence-based mental health promotion programs in post-secondary institutions. The HAP can enhance universities capacities to support their students by helping build their resilience and reducing the high need for mental health services. I also consider mindfulness a critical component of education, which excitedly was added in 2015 to the Personal Skills component of the revised Ontario Health and Physical Education curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Finally, as the practice of mindfulness is a significant part of my life, I appreciate teaching mindfulness, gaining new perspectives, and addressing the ongoing challenges of maintaining a formal daily mindfulness practice in my own life. In this research, I endeavored to apply my personal knowledge and experience with the practice as a way to support participant's questions and challenges.

When I started my research I also started to assist Dr. Coholic with a new research project delivering the HAP to youth experiencing difficulties in school. These groups were delivered concurrently with my two education student groups in the Multidisciplinary Qualitative Research Lab at Laurentian. What became apparent to me was the more opportunity I had to facilitate the program, the more effective a facilitator I became. Having foundational experience teaching, instructing yoga, and delivering mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) aided in the process, but the more opportunity I had to deliver the program, the more my proficiency strengthened.

As researchers, it is essential that we are aware of the contribution we make to the research process as well as the changes we undergo as a result of participation (Palaganas et al., 2017). Personal growth and learning as a result of engaging in the research process was

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exponential, from learning to facilitate the HAP, to gaining insight into the program's credibility, the expansion of the population-base to whom I facilitate mindfulness programming, increased therapeutic presence, and a deepened knowledge and understanding of MBIs to name a few.

Interestingly, my personal mindfulness meditation practice frequently reflected how I felt about session delivery. It became somewhat of a barometer during meditation. For example, if I felt that a session was not effective in teaching the mindfulness concept intended, during meditation, my mind shifted to thoughts of self-judgement and reflections of the session experience and how it could have been improved. When I became aware of these often-frequent shifts I held them with awareness, acknowledged their presence and then shifted my awareness back to the breath. For me this was a valuable way to recognize how I felt about my facilitation and the progress of the groups. I feel that being a mindfulness practitioner allowed me to be present with the group. I listened to participants allowing them to feel heard and valued. Further, I found that the facilitators' active participation in the activities supports authentic connection. This is where the essence of growth and learning begins as we model and guide participants through art activities, and self-reflections of thoughts and feelings.

I believe my most significant influence on program facilitation resulted from cultivating a compassionate heart, together with my lived experience, and my personal and professional mindfulness practice. In group, I held space for participants allowing them to feel heard and supported during their self-exploration. I embodied non-judgmental awareness exuding a loving presence that allowed them to be challenged to go deeper exploring the validity of their thoughts and I consciously validated their emotions. This may have impacted the students' experiences of the program increasing their comfort and creating an inclusive environment.

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The actualization of facilitating the HAP to education students for my own research study provided a foundation for my personal growth. This development serves to support my work going forward as I have gained valuable insight into the use of mindfulness to reduce suffering, the HAP as an accessible approach facilitating mindfulness, the value of program facilitation experience to improve delivery, and the importance of timing in program delivery.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

#### **Quantitative Data Collection**

Analysis of pre- and post-group scores included self-report measures from the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (see Appendix G) and the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (see Appendix H).

The *Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)*, is a widely well-known psychological self-report measure for perception of stress. Ten test items using a 5-point Likert scale measured how often a participant felt or thought a certain way. Examples of some PSS scale items include, Item 1 (“In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly”), Item 2 (“In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life”), and Item 3 (“In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”). Scoring of the measure required reversing response values and summing up the scores. The higher the score, the higher the level of perceived stress. The test took approximately 10-minutes to complete. The PSS was selected for use in this research study because it was easily accessible online, gratuitous, and it is one of the more commonly used measures to assess perceived stress (Denovan, Dagnall, Dhingra, & Grogan, 2017). According to Denovan et al., (2017) the PSS is an effective “psychometrically sound” multi-scale measure of

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stress for university students (p. 10). For the complete Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) please refer to Appendix G.

The *Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)* assessment tool used to rate each participant's level of mindfulness consisted of 15 items and participants' answers were based on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from (1) almost always to (6) almost never. Participants responded according to frequency or infrequency of experience. Example of some MAAS scale items include, Item 7 ("It seems I am 'running on automatic' without much awareness"), Item 8 ("I run through activities without being really attentive to them"), and Item 9 ("I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I am doing right now to get there").

Scoring of the measure involves adding up and dividing responses by 15 to determine the participants' level of mindfulness. The higher the score, the higher the level of mindfulness. The highest possible score is six, while the lowest possible score is one and the typical average is 3.86. To date, mindfulness is generally measured by self-report inventories (Osman, Lamis, Bagge, Credential, & Barnes, 2016).

The MAAS was selected for use in this research because it was easily accessible online, gratuitous, and one of the most widely used measurements (Osman et al., 2016). The MAAS has been shown to be a valid and reliable single dimensional measure of dispositional mindfulness, with a good range of internal consistency and test-retest reliability (Carlson, & Brown, 2005; Brown, & Ryan, 2003; Osman et al., 2016). For the complete Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) please refer to Appendix H.



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### **Qualitative Data Collection**

According to Rabiee (2004) dynamics of the group interview design may impact data collected, potentially offering more comprehensive responses than individual interviews, and generating a significant amount of data in a short period of time.

The group interview approach was used as it mirrored the group process and was a viable option given the available resources. The use of semi-structured group interviews did impact data collection since participants were influenced by the responses of the other group members. This was evident in the interviews as one participant would agree with or expand upon what another group member had contributed. According to Frey and Fontana (1991) group interviews are commonly excluded from social research, when in fact they should be considered as a highly efficacious use of resources. Moreover, the group interview enables researchers to collect a wider expanse of data although the group format may inhibit comprehensive individual disclosure commonplace in the one-on-one interview format (DiCicco-Bloom, & Crabtree, 2006).

During the group interviews, questions were poised to the entire group and open for anyone to respond (see Appendix I for example questions). Although this interview technique may have motivated more outspoken participants to contribute more, the interviewers encouraged responses from all participants by creating a safe inclusive environment and allowing time for individuals to respond. In an effort to minimize my influence, I did not attend either the pre- or post-group interviews.

Participants attended two group discussions: the first pre-group interview was held immediately before the first group session began, and was conducted to establish participants' experience with and prior knowledge of mindfulness as well as their reason for choosing to attend the program. The second post-group interview followed immediately after the final

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session ended and was conducted to determine the participants' experiences of attending the HAP, their understanding of mindfulness after participation, and if they would use what they learned going forward in their own lives personally and in their role as teachers. These group interview sessions did not exceed one hour in duration. The two student RAs that co-facilitated the program with me conducted the two pre-group interviews sessions together under the supervision/training of Dr. Coholic and I. Dr. Coholic was in attendance for the last portion of group one's pre-group interview to offer the RAs guidance. For the post-group interviews each RA conducted the interview on their own for the group they co-facilitated. This required one RA to also conduct a separate one-on-one interview with Alison as she was unable to attend the final session and post-group interview.

Group interviews were audio and video-recorded using the equipment in the lab for ease of transcriptions – the audio and video were initially recorded onto a memory card. For confidentiality purposes, once the recordings were securely transferred to a computer for transcription, the original video and audio recordings were deleted from the memory card and recorder. The transcriptions were stored on a computer in the lab where they were password protected and only accessible by the researcher. Hard copies of the consent forms (see Appendix J) were kept double locked in a locked file cabinet in the locked lab at the university until such time as the final thesis is complete and accepted. Once the raw data is no longer required it will be destroyed.

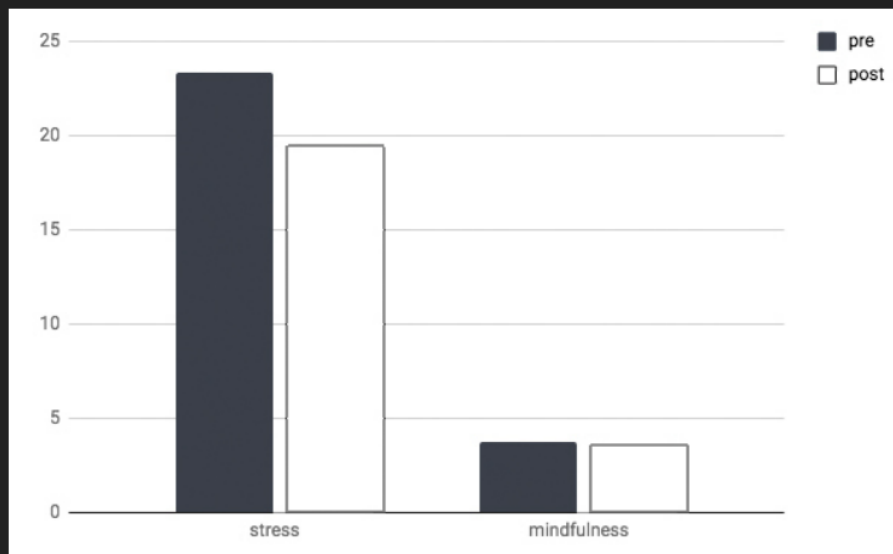
### **Quantitative Analysis of Data**

I hypothesized that students participating in the arts-based mindfulness group program would experience a decrease in perceived stress and an increase in dispositional mindfulness. Paired t-tests were used to compare the means of the two samples of related data scores from the

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two measures taken before (pre) and after (post) participation in the program and were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, (SPSS) Statistical GradPack 17.0 software to achieve summary data.

The quantitative analysis did not confirm the hypothesis as the data scores showed no statistical significance (see Table 1 below). However, the PSS results did drop slightly from pre- to post-group, while the MAAS results showed a decline in mindfulness from pre- to post-participation. More details exploring the quantitative findings will be described in the next chapter.



### Quantitative Data Results

Table 1

Quantitative Results Table

### **Qualitative Analysis of Data**

The audio recordings were transcribed and coded. Following transcription, video recordings were viewed to ensure transcription accuracy as there was some difficulty in identifying the voices of participants and at times visual cues provided by the video recordings were helpful to recognize the speaker. To maintain authenticity of the data presented, text was directly extracted from the transcribed interviews, with no modifications or corrections. I followed the six phases of thematic analysis as initially described by Braun and Clarke (2006):

Step 1: Familiarizing yourself with your data

Step 2: Generating initial codes

Step 3: Searching for themes

Step 4: Reviewing and analyzing themes

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

Step 6: Producing the report

The analysis began by familiarizing myself with the data through immersing myself in the transcription process (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). Guided by the research questions, this process of data analysis necessitated repetitive interactions with the visual and audio recordings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun, Clarke, and Weate, 2016). Once transcribed, I began coding the data considering as many potential patterns or themes as possible (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used both hard copy printed excerpts and NVivo computer software to compile, organize and gain valuable insight into the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun, et, al., 2016). Hard copy coding began once the recordings were fully transcribed and I printed out a copy of the transcriptions. I began by reading each line and initially using a different colour highlighter/pen/marker to

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identify each code. When I ran out of colours, I started to use contrasting mechanisms to differentiate the codes such as underlining, boxing, and circling.

Then I used memoing to record reflective notes about the data within the margins of the document. From the transcribed document, I identified approximately 69 initial codes that I repeatedly reviewed, sorted, categorized and collapsed until they had been reduced to 10 codes. Then I read through the 10 codes considering relationships between the categories. NVivo was also used for data analysis and organization. This computer software allowed me to upload all the transcriptions and then repeat the initial analysis I had done with the hardcopy transcriptions. This time I re-categorized the data into nodes. This was a valuable opportunity for me to reconsider original interpretations and then assign data to a node.

Once all the data was coded, I reviewed and analyzed the extensive list of codes looking to consolidate and combine them into fewer, more comprehensive, inclusive themes based on repeating patterns and relationships between the codes/nodes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2016). Once the analysis with NVivo was complete, I had 77 codes that were further categorized, combined or collapsed as necessary. All of this analysis resulted in the preliminary construction of 10 consistent initial themes. I discussed this analysis with my supervisor to further refine it and develop the main themes.

When the major themes were established, I compared the themes, refined and integrated them further, and then created a thematic map (Braun & Clarke, 2007). Once five major themes were constructed and a thematic map created, I re-read the data to ensure the themes were relevant (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2016). Next, using the thematic map, I composed a clear, concise and detailed definition of each major theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2016). The five major themes were (1) Increased self-awareness and self-understanding from

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learning mindfulness. Participants described increased awareness of their thoughts, feelings, and judgements that developed over the course of their participation in the program. They gained insight and understanding and more self-awareness noticing and discussing their thoughts, emotions and behaviors collectively; (2) Benefits of social work practice with groups, which demonstrated the benefits of the peer group for support, to create connection, belonging, a sense of normalizing, and increased self-understanding; (3) Use of arts based methods to learn mindfulness made the program something participants looked forward to each week. The participants expressed that the use of art to learn mindfulness made the concepts accessible and fun; (4) Increased capacity to respond more effectively to stressors. This theme indicated improved capacity to manage stressors with participants describing upturns in their mood, increased self-understanding, increased capacity to ask for help, and awareness of self-judgments; and (5) Foundational understanding of mindfulness concepts through experiential practice. The program provided them with an understanding of the usefulness of mindfulness in both their personal lives and the lives of their future students.

To further validate the results and refine the analysis, I met with my first supervisor and together we further developed the five major themes into three main themes. I revised the thematic map integrating sub-themes to offer additional support and help organize the three main themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2016). During the final stage of the thematic analysis I defined the themes and composed a brief explanation of the analysis to offer clarity, and transparency of the process and final analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2016).

### **Ethical Considerations**

As a member of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Services Workers (OCSWSSW), adherence to a code of ethics compels confidentiality of personal information

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acquired in a professional capacity. Ethics approval from Laurentian University was obtained on May 20, 2016, through submission to the Laurentian University Ethical Review Board for research involving human subjects (see Appendix K). I ensured adherence with the informed consent. To ensure ethical practices I assigned pseudonyms to participants and raw data has remained secure and has not been shared with anyone not directly involved in the research. Prior to beginning the HAP program, the purpose of the study was discussed with all participants and signed consents were procured. A copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix J. As group participation with peers exploring thoughts and feelings may elicit difficult emotions, group sessions were introduced to the participants in the group setting as confidential, non-judgmental, safe environments where they were invited to develop their own set of group rules applicable to all members including the facilitators for the duration of the group. This was discussed with the participants in the first session when they participated in the “group rules” activity. As lead facilitator of the two groups, I am a master of social work student with a degree in education and experience with the program, competent to manage difficulties that may arise. However, a list of local support services was also made available for the participants (see Appendix M).

### **Methods of Verification**

Triangulation included the use of quantitative and qualitative methods to corroborate evidence of the findings (Creswell, 2013). I personally transcribed all the data from the group interviews, immersing myself in the data. I analyzed the transcripts and debriefed with the thesis supervisor as an external check of my interpretations (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013), many rich thick related descriptions will serve to further support the facts. As part of this research study, to address researcher bias, I reflected upon my biases and prejudices and invited

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the two other RAs to conduct the pre- post-group interview sessions (Creswell, 2013). To further validate the results, I sent my preliminary analysis to my first thesis supervisor for investigator triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The three central themes suggest the delivery of mindfulness using arts-based methods proved beneficial for education students. The three themes are: (1) increased self-awareness and mindfulness, which encompasses the sub-themes: meta-awareness, metacognition and meta-emotions, responding more effectively to stressors using mindfulness, the use of mindfulness, and increased awareness of self-judgement and judgement toward others; (2) benefits of group work, which encompasses the sub-themes: feeling supported, normalizing, fostering feelings of connection and belonging, increased self-understanding and fun; and (3) benefits of arts-based methods, which included the sub-themes: making mindfulness concepts accessible, opportunities for self-expression, guiding future application, increased self-understanding and fun (see Figure 1 below).

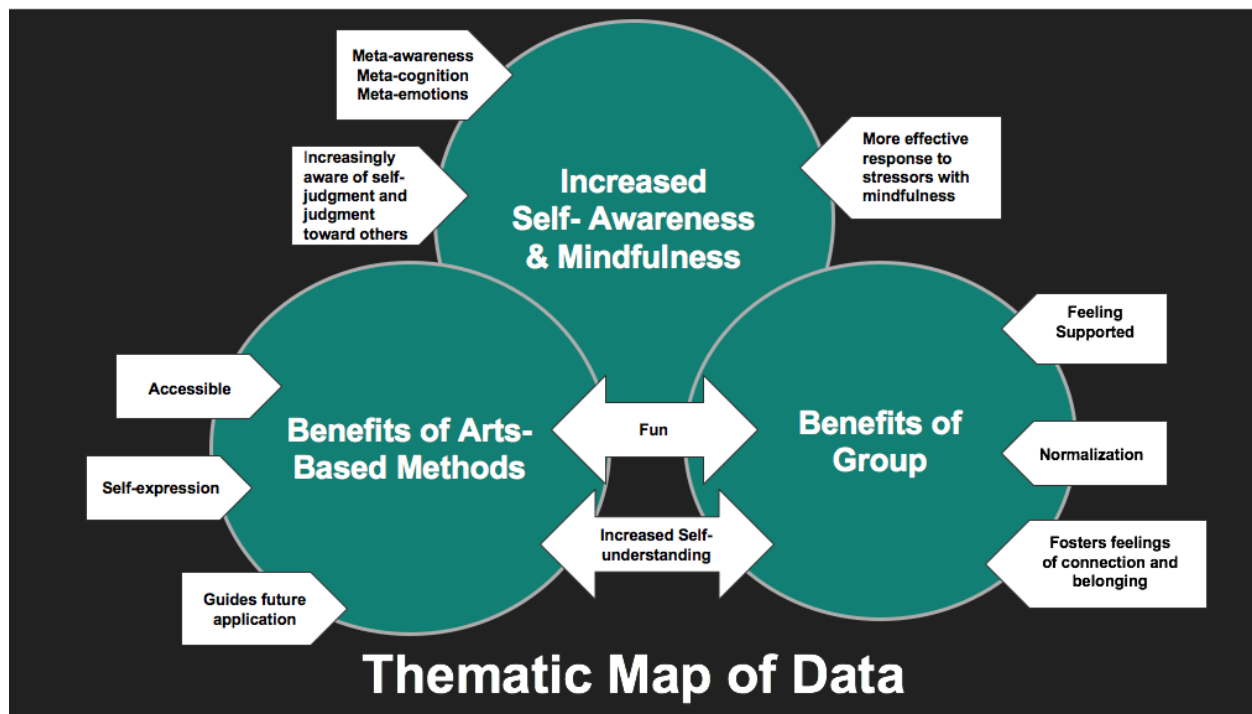




Figure 1

Thematic Map of Data

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I described the study design including the study's theoretical framework, the research strategy, and data analysis techniques. The process of data collection and analysis was broken down and described in stages. Researcher reflexivity was shared to offer transparency concerning author background and potential biases. Furthermore, to ensure pellucidity, I shared particulars of my personal commitment to mindfulness practice, personal reflections and my ongoing student/supervisor relationship with the HAP creator and research lead. The study setting, target population, recruitment process, ethical considerations, and participants were described, and validation methods clarified to support findings. Finally, quantitative results as well as the three central themes constructed from my qualitative analysis were outlined. In the next chapter I will discuss the findings and their relevance.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

The qualitative research process described within the previous chapter summarized the way in which the thematic analysis facilitated a comprehensive examination of the data from the participants' semi-structured pre- and post-group interviews. This chapter provides a summary and discussion of the findings from this mixed methods study designed to explore the benefits of a 12-week arts-based mindfulness group program with post-secondary students enrolled at Laurentian University. I will discuss the quantitative and qualitative data analysis, delineating the three main themes and their sub-themes to validate their construction.

### **Quantitative Data Interpretation**

Quantitative data from both the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) measures taken pre- and post-group showed no statistical significance. However, the raw scores show a small decrease in the participants perceived stress at the end of the 12-week program even though participants expressed that end of semester was extremely stressful with cumulative assignments due and impending exams. A recent study that explored the impact of timing on post-secondary student stress found that there was heightened risk for “negative stress-related consequences” at the end of semester (Pitt, Oppress, Tapia, and Gray, 2017, p. 61). Due to the heightened stress for students at semester conclusion (when the post-group test was administered), the post-group test results may not have accurately revealed the impact of the HAP on stress reduction.

Recent research on mindfulness suggested that, “asking an individual to introspect on their level of mindfulness has an element of circularity—non-mindful individuals may not even be aware of their lack of mindfulness” (Wong, Massar, Chee, & Lim, 2018, p. 1). To provide a little more insight, an example of one of the MAAS questions requires participants to assess how often they experience the following, “I find myself doing things without paying much attention” (Brown & Ryan, 2003). If they are not aware of where their attention is directed at any given time, anticipating an accurate response to this item may be unreasonable. Therefore, it could be argued that administering the MAAS pre-group to participants who lack understanding of mindfulness concepts may result in skewed data, whereas, the post-group MAAS scores may provide a more accurate measure of their level of mindfulness due to their newly acquired knowledge about mindfulness.

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With regards to effect size, we found no statistical significant differences between the pre- and post- test for the MAAS, conversely, we found medium effect size for the PSS. Although there may be multiple possibilities to account for this as the students perceived stress decreased, this might suggest that the statistics are acceptable as even though the sample size is small. However, we cannot draw a precise conclusion because they may also be due to sample error. As this research involved a small number of participants, the low statistical power of the analysis compromises the researchers' ability to make an accurate judgment about the true effect of the intervention. Should this study be replicated with a larger sample of participants, the analysis may yield different findings.

The study concluded with seven female participants, six of whom were education students. Recruitment of male education students to the group was difficult, as they were the minority in the education program (Statistics Canada, 2006, Table 13). As indicated earlier due to the small sample size of pre- post-measure data, the results are not generalizable to the larger population. Further research is needed with a larger population of education students to accurately determine the effectiveness of the intervention on their perceived stress and level mindfulness. For this study efforts to obtain a greater number of participants were constrained by limited resources, scheduling of program delivery, and the availability and capacity of the MQRL. There may have been further limits to participant recruitment such as an inadequate understanding of mindfulness, and, as a result, low confidence of potential benefits of program participation.

### **Qualitative Data Interpretation and Discussion**

Qualitative data analysis from pre- and post-group group interviews led to the construction of three main themes that describe the students' experiences of program

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participation. The themes are: (1) increased self-awareness and mindfulness, (2) benefits of arts-based methods, and (3) benefits of group. The following is a description of these three themes and the sub-themes within them that illustrate how students' experiences of participation in the HAP helped to mitigate the negative effects of their stress, and offered them practical strategies that demonstrated how they could effectively transfer these newly acquired skills into their future classrooms.

### **Increased Self-Awareness and Mindfulness**

Previous researchers have documented that Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) have been shown to heighten both self-awareness (Frank, et al., 2015; Emerson et al., 2017; Gockel et al., 2013; Thomas, 2017) and mindfulness (Lynch et al., 2011; de Bruin et al., 2014; Galante et al., 2018; Kerr, et al., 2017). The theme “increased self-awareness and mindfulness” encompasses how the students were able to learn mindfulness concepts and skills through engaging in games, activities, experiential mindfulness practices, and discussions each week thereby developing their self-awareness. Categories that make up this theme include meta-emotions, meta-awareness, meta-cognition, increased awareness of judgments, and improved capacity to cope with stressors.

Post-group interviews revealed students' increased self-awareness. Self-awareness can be defined as the “conscious knowledge of one's own character, feelings, motives, and desires” (Oxford University Press, 2018). Enhanced self-awareness was revealed as participants described experiences of increased recognition of their thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Through learning about mindfulness, participants gained insight and understanding into their own thoughts and emotions, with an emphasis on their self-judgments. After having completed the 12-week program participants were invited to provide a definition of mindfulness as part of the post-group

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interview. Most participants had no prior understanding of mindfulness. Their definitions were linked with experiences of increased self-awareness. This perspective is apparent in the following excerpt where Alison, a participant from group one, described mindfulness during her post one-on-one interview, she declared:

I didn't know what it [mindfulness] was before I started, I was very confused ... mindfulness ... is to me knowing your emotions, knowing your feelings, knowing your dreams ... the biggest part of mindfulness ... I suppose it would be really getting to know myself.

Definitions provided by other group members also support self-awareness as a result of learning mindfulness concepts and participation in experiential practice. Moreover, mindfulness was described by participants as a practice that cultivated heightened awareness of thoughts, physical sensations, and emotions. Increased self-awareness also became apparent in several other more implicit reflections where participants described their engagement in the art activities as having revealed answers to self-inquiry they could not previously resolve. For example, Alison expressed her experience of increased self-awareness through the art. She stated, "I found that once I came here I answered a lot of questions that I couldn't answer before I was painting, or drawing or whatever we were doing that day ..."

An art-based activity that many participants described as generating increased self-awareness was Me as a Tree. As explained earlier, for this activity, participants are simply invited to draw themselves as a tree. The purpose of this activity is to encourage participants to engage in a fun, non-threatening self-inquiry, and to share a little about themselves with the group. The Me as a Tree activity is introduced early in the program, usually by the third or fourth session, and also helps build group cohesion through self-disclosure and the revelation of group members commonalities and differences (Coholic, 2016) (see illustration 1 below).

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Illustration 1

### Group One's "Me as a Tree" self-portraits

Illustration 1 demonstrates the groups' diversity which is visible in the uniqueness of their artistic Me as a Tree self-portraiture. It also shows how participants were able to self-reflect and provide an abstract, therefore non-threatening, visual representation of how they perceived themselves. Each participant shared their drawing along with personal interpretations for group discussion and inquiry. Inquiry, in this context, refers to "a contemplative dialogue between teacher and participant that supports the investigation of experience arising from a developed conscious awareness, or meta-awareness, sustained by the practice of mindfulness" (Woods, Rockman, & Collins, 2016, p.3). The dialogue that followed this activity fostered increased self-awareness and group cohesion. Participants described how attributes of their trees were self-reflective. For instance, in one example, a tree is shown with a swing hanging from one of the

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branches. This representation was symbolic of the participant's playful side. Another participant who had also drawn a swing on her tree indicated that she just felt compelled to draw a swing because she had wonderful childhood memories of tree swings. Once she heard the swing described as a metaphor of the playfulness component of the other participants' personality, she acknowledged that she too had a playful side and surmised that perhaps, subconsciously, it was a contributing factor behind her inclusion of the swing on her tree.

Cultivating self-awareness supported participants' understanding concerning the impacts of stress on themselves, their personal values, motives, habituated patterns of behavior, and responses to emotional experiences. Participants were empowered by their heightened self-awareness to build on their strengths as well as identify areas for improvement.

### **Meta-Emotions**

The category of meta-emotions considers participants' increased awareness of their emotions. Exploratory research with education students delivering the Learning to BREATHE (L2B) mindfulness curriculum designed for adolescents to cultivate emotion regulation, attention and performance, found that participation in a brief 6-week mindfulness intervention resulted in improved capacity to manage negative emotions, and achieve emotional clarity (Kerr et al., 2017). Meta-emotions, or participants' awareness of their emotions, was revealed as they described how program participation precipitated a strengthened consciousness of their feelings. Accompanying this developing awareness, participants conveyed an increased ability to directly attend to their emotions as they emerged. This was apparent when Morgan described in what way sharing how she felt each week at the HAP helped her become more aware of her feelings. This increased awareness enabled her to identify her emotions and thus respond more effectively to

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them, instead of suppressing them, which often resulted in an “emotional breakdown.” Morgan acknowledged:

I had way fewer times of just bursting out into tears for no apparent reason because now at least I know the reason. It also happened less often because I address my feelings head on more now than I have in the past so I think it [the HAP] really helped the way I see my situation and the way I react to certain situations ... because I talk about it every week when I’m here I found myself outside of here putting names to my emotions more and talking about my feelings more with the people they affected ...

This quote demonstrates how Morgan became increasingly aware, and was able to regulate her emotions by recognizing them. This finding is consistent with the mindfulness literature that exemplifies self-regulation as a standard outcome of participation in a MBI (Frank, et al., 2015; Emerson et al., 2017; Gockel et al., 2013; Thomas, 2017).

In the following quote, Kasey describes her experience of increased awareness of emotions as she acknowledges her heightened consciousness and capacity to determine whether to accept, or respond to her feelings. After 12-weeks of program participation she provided the following description of mindfulness:

...it’s not so much ... letting go of the things ... but it’s learning how to deal with them ... being mindful of how you either let go or resolve things ... being mindful of feelings instead of letting them get piled up ... just kind of recognizing, that’s what I think.

Kasey attended group each week with the exception of the first session. She also helped co-facilitate youth groups that were held in the later afternoon. The youth groups were a part of Dr. Diana Coholic’s research investigating the benefits and effectiveness of the HAP for vulnerable youth experiencing challenges with schooling. Kasey often spoke in group about the impact of the HAP activities on the youth groups. Although she participated with the education students and remained personally engaged in the process, her initial responses were carefully considered. This early conduct shifted as the weeks progressed, and by the final session she gave the impression of being more at ease, having established a sense of belonging within the group.



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Kasey revealed having times where she felt concern about how she would be perceived, as a result she often endeavored to carefully formulate what she anticipated would be regarded by others as an intelligent response. Kasey described how through her participation in the HAP she was able to recognize these negative beliefs, shift her attention away from them, and remain present with her emotions.

Cassandra, the student most familiar with mindfulness at commencement of group, had previously attended Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT). DBT is a cognitive behavioral therapy program designed to treat borderline personality disorder that teaches mindfulness skills. Cassandra's experience in the HAP supported her earlier training and she developed increased awareness of feelings that made it easier for her to get in touch with them. For instance, when describing how she developed more effective responses to stressors, Cassandra stated:

“Mindfulness really helped me figure out how I’m feeling ... what triggered that emotion ... how I can prevent it or not let myself go into a downward spiral.” Cassandra acknowledged that she had previously experienced difficulty connecting with her emotions. She discussed how participation in the program reinforced her previous learning and supported the implementation of mindfulness strategies into her daily life. This demonstrates how participation in the HAP increased group member's ability to regulate their emotions. This outcome is supported by researchers David and Hayes (2012) who suggest mindfulness enhances attentional capacities supporting improvements in emotion regulation processes.

### **Meta-Awareness**

According to Bodhi (2011) the Buddhist tradition of mindfulness is a practice that cultivates clear intentional awareness of the mind, developing insight to support the reduction of human suffering. Meta-awareness considers participants' increased awareness of their awareness,

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which according to Buddhist philosophy leads to reduced suffering. Individuals' coping mechanisms were revealed and group members recounted how increased awareness from program participation led to the acceptance of negatively perceived emotions. They described being able to relinquish some of their unhealthy habituated patterns of control and reduce judgments toward themselves and others. Participants described how the HAP contributed to reduced feelings of stress and increased consciousness of their minds and bodies. For example, in the next quote, Cassandra described avoidance strategies resulting in experiencing sensations of stress in her body, and attributed her participation in the program to their alleviation. She stated: "...I find that I keep things bottled in ... so when I actually talked about it I felt ... all the stress literally leaving my body ... yeah I felt really light after talking about things here [at HAP]." In this example, Cassandra articulated that her experience in the program helped her recognize habituated patterns of suppressing emotions and acknowledged that talking about them during group discussion offered her visceral relief from the burden of stress.

Participants attributed an increased awareness of their thoughts and feelings to their capacity to cope better in daily life, as indicated by fewer trips to their counsellor, being able to address feelings as they arose, not avoiding negative emotions, and overall reduced distress (as suggested by Cassandra). Research supports these findings as participation in MBIs have been found to alleviate the negative impacts of stress and anxiety by drawing attention to thoughts and feelings, without judgment (Kerrigan et al., 2017; Gockel, Cain, Malove, & James, 2013).

### **Meta-Cognition**

Researchers suggest mindfulness is a state of being in the world that promotes meta-cognitive awareness and decreases ruminative thinking (Davis & Hayes, 2012). The category of meta-cognition considers participants' increased awareness of their thinking. Group members

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described how they became increasingly aware of their thoughts throughout participation in the program. Several of the HAP activities invite participants to reflect on thoughts and/or feelings experienced during the activity. This practice of reflection encouraged present moment awareness during activities, and fostered increased awareness of thoughts and feelings.

For example, Morgan, from group one, revealed an increased awareness that she was goal oriented while engaged in the art activities. Moreover, being in control was a recurring theme with Morgan. It became increasingly apparent over the weeks that she maintained a strong aversion to anything she could not control. She acknowledged this in group discussions and consistently reflected on the unpleasant experience of activities where she felt a loss of control. Morgan's increased awareness and insights into her cognitions is evidence of meta-cognition. These habituated patterns of behavior are the mind's way of trying to think its way out of unpleasant experiences (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2013). Morgan's recognition of her aversion is demonstrated in the following example where she described her least favorite HAP activity, she stated:

... my least favourite [activity] was Bad Day Better, it will always be my least favourite. I don't think I would ever voluntarily do that one again ...[be]cause it drove me crazy. I just didn't like the concept ... I felt like I was ruining the art that I'd already did and I just didn't enjoy that. I wasn't really into the mechanics behind it more than I was into making it look good.

In the Bad Day Better activity, participants are given a series of three separate instructions. First, they are invited to fold a piece of watercolour paper in half and then they are invited to paint their interpretation of a bad day on the left side. Once that is complete they are invited to fold the paper in two so that the painted side is transferred onto the blank right side of the sheet. In the next instruction, participants are invited to paint their interpretation of a good day over top of the imprint of the bad day now reflected onto the right side. Finally, when that is complete, the

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participants are invited to fold the paper one last time to imprint the better day on top of the bad day ultimately improving both days. The purpose of this activity is to support participants understanding that they have the capacity to make a bad day better (Coholic, 2016). (see illustration 2 below).



Illustration 2

### Group Two's "Bad Day Better"

Many participants enjoyed the invitation of the Bad Day Better activity to relinquish control. They remained engaged in the process, unaware of the subsequent instructions, but curious to learn what would follow. When participants reflected on their experiences in the program, as expressed earlier by Morgan, two other group members also expressed their dislike for this activity. They described feelings of frustration when they were asked to fold the page in

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half after creating their paintings, not once, but twice. They felt that the unexpected components of folding the paper that this activity required resulted in dissatisfaction of their final artistic creations. However, their experiences of attachment to the painting provided the opportunity for us as a group to engage in a dialogue exploring the mindfulness concepts of non-attachment and letting go.

In another example of meta-cognition, Ariana, a 3rd year Concurrent Education student, was challenged with arriving to group on time as she had a class immediately beforehand that was located across campus and often ran late. Acceptance was evident, as her delayed arrival was never met with judgment. Group members and facilitators were always welcoming and encouraged Ariana's smooth transition into group. She shared some important experiences of her time in the HAP including the illumination of her habituated pattern of worrying about minor issues or problems. Through the repeated opportunity for self-expression and sharing within group she experienced a conscious shift in the way she processed information, learning to let go. In this example, Ariana shared:

I think the easiest part was ... letting go. Like even today I broke one of my shoelaces I don't even give a shit. I'm just like ok I'm going to take this shoelace out that's broken as hell and replace it with a new one and I just went on with my business and I didn't even care. I think it's really changing the way I carry myself in terms of when stuff happens I don't get bogged down by it, I just kind of let it go, which is nice.

Ariana's description of her non-reactive response to an experience she thought would have previously elicited a negative reaction is indicative of meta-cognition as Ariana acknowledged awareness of a conscious shift in her thinking, which resulted in mediated responses to occurrences previously perceived as frustrating. Further, this quote is evidence of Ariana's increased ability to regulate her emotions, and as indicated earlier, this is a common outcome of participation in a MBIs.

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Researchers have found that even brief exposure to mindfulness practice may result in increased awareness and attention (de Bruin et al., 2014), and reductions in anxiety and judgment (Thomas, 2017). The HAP offers a unique approach to learning mindfulness concepts, and it is not delivered with a required commitment to an extended formal daily practice. Instead concepts are taught more informally through arts-based activities in combination with some brief formalized practice. However, it is hoped that participants will practice and apply what they are learning outside of the group experience. This approach is used to make the program more accessible to populations who may not otherwise engage in mindfulness. With this in mind, participants' meta-cognition and use of mindfulness became increasingly evident as we engaged in different arts-based activities and debriefed about the emergence of thoughts and emotions.

Over the weeks, it became apparent that participants were progressively more enthusiastic to attend. When they entered the room they promptly slipped into their chairs in preparation for the session to commence. Participants were genuinely excited about the art and sharing, although they expressed appreciation for the breathing exercises, meditations and Tai Chi, they did not express the same level of enthusiasm. This was reflected in the post-group interviews where little acknowledgement was attributed to these experiential mindfulness activities. The invitation to explore and discuss thoughts and feelings was new to most, if not all group members. Initially some participants expressed difficulty with this process but this rapidly transformed as they became increasingly comfortable, and even impatient, at times, for the opportunity to share. The two hour program session was no longer sufficient time as participants began articulating their desire for lengthier discussions.

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### **Improved Capacity to Cope with Stressors**

Researchers have found that participation in MBIs such as *L2B* have mitigated the negative effects of stress (Kerr, et al., 2017). The category of more effective responses to stressors considers participants' use of helpful strategies to respond to the negative impact of stressors. There are multiple examples where the students convey their improved capacities to respond to stressors. In this first example, Morgan speaks about how even just the anticipation of attending group later in week led to an elevated mood in the present moment. She stated:

I found myself even just thinking about coming here ... looking forward to it made me have a more positive outlook on my week. Even though I'm stressed right now on Tuesday I'll get to do some arts and crafts and think about and talk about my feelings for the week and it just made me happier.

In another example, Addison described her experiences of engaging in art activities in the group as reducing her experience of academic stress. She submitted that even without a formal mindfulness practice, her learning and experiences within group transformed how she managed in her daily life, she expressed:

I also found coming here alleviated my stress ... I would come into group and then ... doing the art activities I was really feeling a lot less stressed about school stuff ... even though ... I didn't use it [mindfulness] much outside ... I still kind of changed ... my thoughts to be more positive outside of the group so that definitely mindfulness did trigger some capacity to improve choices.

### **Increased Awareness of Judgments**

According to Thomas (2017) the delivery of a brief mindfulness practice within the social work classroom resulted in a reduction in judgments toward others. The sub-theme of increased awareness of judgments considers participants' heightened awareness of when their minds are judging both themselves and others. Kabat-Zinn (2013) considered non-judging an attitudinal foundation of mindfulness practice, he suggested we constantly generate judgments about our experience. We categorize all these judgments in our minds. Generally, the judgments that elicit

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the most emotion, either good or bad dominate the focus of our attention. Awareness of these judgments without trying to change them is the first step toward cultivating non-judgmental awareness.

Non-judgment was introduced in the first HAP session and frequent reminders of this important concept were offered repeatedly throughout the 12 weeks. Non-judgment was perhaps one of the most difficult challenges. The negative self-talk present in group one was continuous throughout the entire 12-weeks. Despite the fact that participants became increasingly aware of their judgments, the awareness did not extinguish their verbalization of the judgments. Instead, over the duration of the program participants began acknowledging their self-judgments on their own.

Awareness of judgments from the facilitators became evident in an effort to achieve a desired artistic outcome. Although our words emphasized the importance of the process, some actions demonstrated a focus on aesthetics. I became increasingly aware of positive feedback from both the facilitators and the participants when art was considered visually exceptional. While conversely there were, no negative judgements made of any individual's art, with some reflection, I realized the positive feedback would have the same impact as negative judgment for participants whose work did not receive praise. It was apparent that positive reinforcement was a deeply habituated pattern of behavior, and as such it was challenging to identify and extinguish. Nonetheless when it came into awareness, we made a conscious effort to shift the focus from the outcome to the process. Endeavoring to remain consistent with comments by expressing genuine curiosity and appreciation of style or technique.

Early self-disclosure from group members Alison and Morgan indicated possible issues with compromised feelings of self-worth. Low self-esteem became increasingly apparent over



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the weeks and months as the two sought opportunities to connect and talk with me outside of the group. Self-judgment was illuminated when Alison described the Dream Script, another activity she disliked because she felt dissatisfied with the final product. In this example, she acknowledged having been very judgmental of herself. Alison stated: “I found it didn’t turn out that well so I was very judgmental of myself on that one.”

Self-disclosure of thoughts and feelings deepened as regular practice supported self-exploration of present moment awareness. For instance, in the following excerpt, Kasey described how initially it was challenging to release her self-judgments. She explained how as she became aware of her thoughts she learned to relinquish some of her self-judgment. Kasey stated:

letting go of judgments toward my own work was definitely really hard at first ... I kind of trained my brain ... to let go [of self-judgment] and just do it [the art] have fun in the moment instead of fixating on what was critical about it and I didn’t compare myself to other work like I would usually do.

This example demonstrates how Kasey used mindful awareness to appreciate the present moment experience and reduce experiences of habituated self-judgment. Many students expressed how their increased awareness in group supported their practice of non-judgment. This foundational concept acknowledges our propensity toward the negative which supports the psychological concept of negativity bias and demonstrates the prevalence of the critical assessments we make toward ourselves and others. In mindfulness practice we don’t attempt to elevate or reject any of our moment-to-moment experience, instead we embrace whatever is present. For example, as I sit here writing my thesis, thoughts emerge suggesting this work is tiresome and difficult and that anything else would be more enjoyable. However, as a mindfulness practitioner, I acknowledge the presence of these thoughts and shift my awareness back to the experience of writing my thesis. As I do this, I embrace and welcome the opportunity

with profound gratitude. This example demonstrates how participants applied their learning to be non-judgmental and self-compassionate.

The child's artwork is organized into a 5x5 grid of 25 squares. The top row features drawings of a house, a dog's head, the word 'family', a Christmas tree, a heart, a church, a colorful abstract scene, and a drawing with the words 'FUN', 'Share', 'Play', 'Smile', and 'family'. The second row shows a family in a car, a volcano, a boat on water, a sun, and a bridge. The third row depicts a car with a red umbrella, a path with trees, a boat with people, and a group of people on a bridge. The fourth row includes a person near a blue box, a target, a person with a bow, a person on a swing, and a person on a boat. The bottom row shows a campfire, a tent, a path with trees, a river with trees, and a landscape with trees and a hill.

### Group Two's "Dream Script"

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Interestingly, Alison recognized that she and another group member were continuously judging their art, but regardless of their self-judgments she felt the activities were fun. In a third example, Ariana addressed how it felt to be part of a group that encouraged non-judgment, Ariana affirmed: “...I found it was ... reassuring ... to put myself in a situation where I didn’t have the option to be judgmental towards the things you [I] were [was] doing ... I really enjoyed it”

Finally, as both groups had non-judgment as one of their “group rules”, there were numerous examples within sessions where both facilitators and group members brought awareness to expressed judgments. This was done with loving-kindness and compassion to foster group members increased awareness of judgments.

Overall participants acknowledged the benefits of their increased self-awareness and mindfulness as a direct result of their engagement in the program.

### **Benefits of Group Work**

The theme “benefits of group work” encompasses the deliberate construction of an environment where participants experienced normalization, inclusion and non-judgment, while feeling welcomed and safe, fostering connections with facilitators and peers. Categories that illustrate this theme include feeling supported, normalizing, fostering feelings of connection and belonging, increased self-understanding, and fun. Group work can be highly effective especially with the emerging adult population who commonly thrive when engaged in positive peer interaction. According to Malekoff (2015) peer groups are distinctive, as members may nudge, challenge, and encourage each other beyond the capacity of any facilitator. Moreover, university students may be absent from familial units for the first time in their lives and at increased risk of loneliness and isolation within an alien environment. Group work opportunities such as the HAP

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provide students with a sheltered environment of peers who support and encourage the sharing of thoughts and emotions in a vulnerable and authentic way.

In this first example, Ariana explained why she valued the group environment. She stated:

... it's just more effective to be in a group setting doing art and experiencing it together ... it brings it whole and makes it into this nice little package of mindfulness ... I don't think we get the opportunity very often to be in such a nice situation where you are surrounded by people who understand what you're doing and what you're going through.

Acceptance and non-judgment were vital strengths-based group work components necessary to create an environment conducive to sharing openly with others. This type of environment allowed participants to experience normalization of their thoughts and feelings and decrease their feelings of separation. Moreover, the HAP provides fun opportunities for participants to collaborate, build connections and create a foundation of support.

### **Feeling Supported**

According to Coholic (2016), the group work component of the HAP promotes connection and belonging, offering participants a nurturing environment. Feeling supported considers participants' experiences of feeling support by other group members and facilitators within the HAP. Fostering a safe environment of non-judgmental facilitators and peers encourages self-discovery through an openness for experiential exploration. In this example, Cassandra described how the relationships that formed within the group allowed members to authentically connect with their emotions. She stated:

I think there was a lot of comfort because we ... built that connection between everyone. So that kind of made it easier to get in touch with feelings ... which is something I struggle with a lot yeah but I think the comfort helped.

Erin, a psychology student who entered the HAP having expressed an interest in art therapy, later revealed that she was attending the program for personal reasons. She had

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originally enrolled in Laurentian Barrie but when they shut down the campus she had to relocate to Sudbury to continue her studies. The Barrie campus closure devastated Erin as she had not been prepared to leave her Simcoe County home. Although her attendance was erratic Erin described the HAP as the one thing she enjoyed about her time in Sudbury. For example, in the following quote, Erin expressed feelings of connection and non-judgment from group members even though she was frequently absent, she stated: “I found we really connected well as a group ...even after a couple of weeks ... if I wasn’t here ... it [the connection] made it easier to come back ...”. Erin’s Sudbury experience was difficult, and she disclosed that she would go home to Barrie on the weekend and struggle to return to Laurentian on Monday. Often by group on Wednesday morning she was still at home. Despite these challenges, when attending, Erin was engaged and appeared to authentically enjoy her participation in the HAP. She was interested in mindfulness and spent time during sessions inquiring into the concepts we were teaching.

Both groups were described by participants as warm and welcoming, and a place they felt a sense of connection and belonging. These findings are consistent with those in the literature that describe social group work as supporting interconnectedness (Norton et al., 2014), and fostering a sense of belonging (Malekoff, 2015).

### **Normalizing**

The concept of normalization considers that through authentic, vulnerable dialogue participants’ experiences, previously perceived as abnormal, were identified as similar to other group members, and as such regarded as normal. It may be isolating if individuals feel their experiences are different. The group work component of the program promotes normalization (Coholic, 2016). In the following example, Alison describes how collaborating on group art

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activities led to the normalization of thoughts and emotions. She stated: “sometimes a lot of us were thinking the same thing, feeling the same thing, having the same emotions and to do the group activities and see what we came up with was really really cool.”

The purpose of the Group Coat of Arms (aka Group Symbol) activity is to help develop group cohesion and to establish a group identity. Participants are invited to collaborate to construct a group symbol that is representative of themselves as a group so that they co-create a group identity (Coholic, 2016). In this example, the group members agreed to make the group’s symbol a flower, with the pistil in the center symbolic of their interconnectedness. Each member drew and decorated one petal to represent themselves. One of the girls drew a design on her petal with pastels that was soft and wispy to represent how she was feeling at the time, while another participant drew a big heart in the middle of her petal to represent her compassionate heart. Once the symbol was complete, the girls added a stem and spoke about how the flower represented both their individuality and their interconnectedness.



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### Illustration 4

#### Group One “Group Coat or Arms or Group Symbol”

Through weekly participation, individuals became increasingly familiar with the other group members through active listening. In the following quote a participant describes the Thoughts Jar activity as an opportunity to normalize her experiences and develop empathy,

Kasey stated:

when you hear other people’s day [Thought Jar] ...you kind of take a look and say as much stuff as I have going on there’s probably something in someone else’s life that’s affecting them just the same. It’s kind of interesting to see how you can connect with people in a mindful way.

Taking time to be remain present and actively engage in listening while other group members were sharing helped students recognize the universality of difficulties. Experiencing normalization helped the groups evolved into supportive communities where members felt acceptance and belonging.

### **Fostering Feelings of Connection and Belonging**

According to Malekoff (2015), group becomes a place where members feel a sense of belonging. In HAP, facilitators are responsible to foster a safe growth-promoting environment that encourages individuals to nurture connections with other group members and gain a sense of belonging within the group environment (Coholic, Oystnick, Posteraro, & Loughheed, 2016). Moreover, HAP applies a purposeful use of social group work which accepts the distinctiveness of each group and appreciates that groups generate their own experiences; this method is used to support the development of group cohesion (Coholic et al., 2016). Research suggested the experience of strong group cohesion supports successful results (Harris, Brazeau, Clarkson, Brownlee, & Rawana, 2012). An early activity that demonstrates this is Painting on a Line where a line of string is hung in the room and clothespins are used to hang a single piece of paper for

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each participant from the line. Group members are invited to paint whatever they'd like on their paper but they may not touch the paper with anything but a paint brush. This activity offers participants the opportunity to experience how their actions have a direct impact on others. The purpose of Painting on a Line is to remain focused on the present moment, let go of the need to control the outcome, do something creative, and have fun (Coholic, 2016). This activity often causes frustration as the paper swings on the line making a predictable outcome difficult. Moreover, other participants that are painting their pictures also affect the stability of the paper. This demonstrates interconnectedness and how our actions impact others. Through this awareness individuals may begin to nurture a sense of belonging. In the following quote, Erin expressed why Painting on a Line was her favorite activity. She stated:

Painting on a line [was my favorite activity] because it really made me aware of the people around me and I feel that's really important ... that sense that we are together, this is our community, what you do affects other people and what they do is going to affect you too.



Illustration 5

### Group One "Painting on a Line"

In her description, Erin made references to a sense of togetherness and how the actions of one affects the collective, which she suggests fosters a sense of community. In another example, Alison described the experience of group activities fostering connection. She stated: "I learned



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it's really fun to do projects together. Like when we made our little island with all our different places it made us feel closer.” The activity Alison mentioned is called Group Island where participants are told they are stranded together on a deserted island and they are each invited to select three things to bring with them to this island. In Alison’s group, members were strategic and chose items collectively so that they would not have duplicates; this required they work together. They also created multiple pathways throughout the island to connect the different shelters they each designed. Finally, several participants felt strongly that Warm Fuzzies supported connection and belonging in the group. In this example, Ariana describes why she enjoyed the Warm Fuzzies activity, she indicated; “I kinda like the Warm Fuzzies [activity] cause ... it really gives a chance to build community.” This activity invites group members to send positive messages to each other in the form of notes that get inserted into uniquely decorated envelopes featuring group member’s names as well as words or drawing that are representative of them. With clothespins, these envelopes are all individually secured to a single piece of string, which gets hung in the group room. The envelopes remain hung for the full duration of the group and participants are welcome to add messages at any time. The piece of string from which all the envelopes are hung is symbolic of the group members’ interconnectedness. According to Reid (1991) an effective group with strong group cohesion provides participants an experimental laboratory where they can safely test social interactions and receive valuable verbal and non-verbal feedback from both peers and facilitators.

### **Increased Self-Understanding**

Participants discussed how they fostered heightened understanding of themselves from participation within the group environment. In the following example, Alison communicates how she felt through group inquiry, she learned more about herself:

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... [HAP is] a way to find yourself through art ... find yourself and have others help you ... someone would point out something they saw in your art that maybe you didn't see and they're kind of helping you discover yourself as well.

Group inquiry as described in this quote occurred following all the art-based activities when participants were provided an invitation to share their art and any thoughts or emotions related to their experience of the process and their final product. After sharing, other group members and facilitators would often inquire about the process and the outcome. This process facilitates the opportunity for further self-exploration and heightened self-understanding.

The arts-based methods approach supports group development and cohesion, which leads to increased self-understanding.

### **Fun**

HAP offers a fun and engaging approach to learning mindfulness concepts. Addison, a 4th year Concurrent Education student from group one, initially decided to attend the HAP to learn mindfulness concepts she could bring to her classroom. By the post-group interview Addison's initial purpose in attending the HAP had shifted. She felt her personal gain from participation in the HAP each week was significant. The program offered her a time and space to get away from the stressors of life and an opportunity to be present. In this example, she expressed how HAP was personally beneficial, Addison stated:

I liked the group atmosphere ... it made the [experience] more fun, I would say it [the HAP] also helped my mental health ... I don't usually take the time to think about myself ... I have to do my homework or go to work ... I always have something on the go so it's obviously stressful when you have 800 things to do in one day. So, with [the] HAP it's helped to better think about what it is that you do.

In another example, Alison described enjoyment at being able to manage her stress in a group where she felt safe and not judged, she stated: "being able to come here and talk as a group and be with a group of people where there was no judgment, nothing left the room, ...it was

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really fun to do it [de-stress] that way”. Fun was a word frequently used among the participants in post-group interviews.

Overall participants acknowledged the benefits of group for support, feelings of acceptance, connection and belonging. Being part of the group helped participants experience normalization of their thoughts and feelings, and increase their self-understanding through sharing and group inquiry in a fun and safe environment.

### **Benefits of Arts-Based Methods**

Van Lith, Schofield, and Fenner (2013) suggest that arts-based methods provide participants creative opportunities for self-discovery and expression. These opportunities encourage exploration and understanding of experiences that extend beyond traditional approaches (McNiff, 2007). The theme “benefits of arts-based methods” encompasses how the use of arts-based methods supported the education students’ experiences of the HAP. For instance, arts-based methods helped make mindfulness concepts accessible, offered opportunities for self-expression, guided future application, increased self-understanding, and promoted an enjoyable experience. The use of arts-based methods supported the education students’ acquisition of mindfulness concepts: students described how the art activities made learning mindfulness more accessible. They related how much they looked forward to attending group emphasizing the fun engaging art activities.

The Doodle Draw activity is the first arts-based activity introduced in the HAP, and as such provides an effective foundation as it allows participants to become familiar with the program’s approach. The purpose of the Doodle Draw activity is to help the participants feel comfortable with the creative process. Group members are encouraged to doodle on a piece of paper for a short time. Next, participants are invited to modify their doodle to create a picture

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(Coholic, 2016). Initially the participants were a little confused by the invitation to doodle, but even those who didn't do the activity exactly as prescribed happily shared how they felt, and what they thought, before, during, and after the activity. This warm up art activity invites creativity and different perspectives and demonstrates from the start that the quality of the artistic creation is not relevant. This introductory activity also allows for safe non-threatening sharing as participants often speak about the challenge of transforming their doodle into a picture.



Illustration 6

Group One “Doodle Draw”

### **Making Mindfulness Concepts Accessible**

As indicated earlier, HAP is an emergent approach to learning mindfulness which may help reduce rates of attrition, as it is regarded as fun and engaging; adjectives not often used to describe mainstream MBIs. In one example Ciara described art as a fun, engaging activity and suggested it was a good foundation for learning unfamiliar concepts: “Being around peers, feeling safe in a comfortable environment like [HAP], [engaged in] art [activities], ...[you] start

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with something you're comfortable with and then you can branch out into other things." In another example, Ariana acknowledged her diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and remarked that had the HAP involved only participation in traditional mindfulness activities it would have been extremely difficult for her to participate in the program, she stated:

... if I had only done meditation and Tai Chi I would have went crazy... I have ADHD and can't focus at the best of times ... when I'm doing art I can sit down and really immerse myself into what I'm doing which is ... what it's all about... the mindful part ... trying to bring yourself into what you're experiencing instead of putting it on the back burner.

Bringing yourself into the experience, as Ariana suggested, is an indication of her applied understanding of the concept of mindfulness, directing attention to the present and becoming fully engaged in the experience. All participants acknowledged the use of arts-based methods for learning mindfulness as fundamental as it enabled them to learn concepts that may have otherwise been elusive.

### **Opportunities for Self-Expression**

Arts-based methods are holistic and strengths-based, and as such can be spiritual, emotional, and an effective outlet for self-expression and communication. The participants shared how their art creations in group became a form of self-expression. In this example, Alison stated:

"in HAP ... we express it [emotions] through what we were drawing, what we were writing and then people [group members] almost just understood without you having to explain everything ...so I find that kinda cool."

In another example Ciara, a 2nd year Concurrent Education student from group two, acknowledged navigating significant mental health concerns. She articulated her appreciation of the program and described why she believed it would be feasible for all university students, she

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stated: "... you don't have to be good at art ... if you're in the right group there is no judgment you can be in the moment."

The purpose of the Feelings Inventory activity is to help participants become more aware of their feelings. Group members are invited to reflect on and record all the feelings they have experienced over the day and then assign a numerical value to each feeling based on the amount of the day they felt each feeling. On a separate piece of paper, participants are invited to depict their feelings from the day using dimensions that are in direct correlation to the amount of the day they felt each feeling (Coholic, 2016).

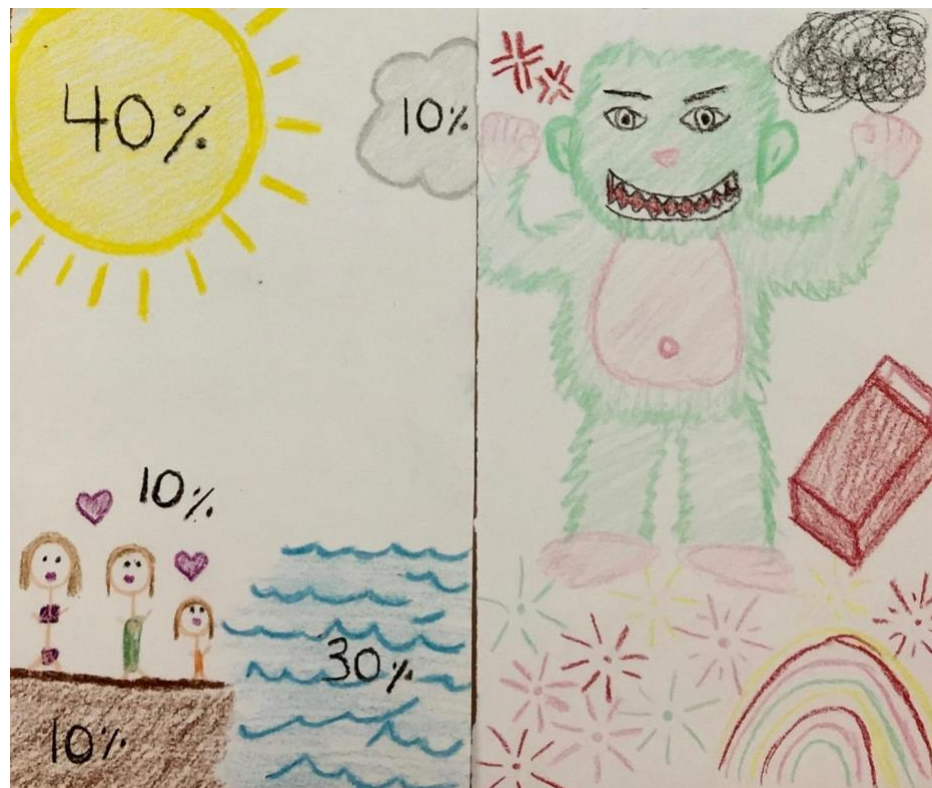


Illustration 7

### Group Two "Feelings Inventory"

The two examples above demonstrate diversity within the group, and how the invitation allowed each participant the opportunity to reflect on their feelings from the day providing a

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platform for their personal distinct creative self-expression. The picture on the left depicts the participant's feelings from the day as a landscape drawing with people. The group member decided to write out percentages for each item within the illustration to convey the amount of time they experienced each emotion throughout the day. The sun symbolizes happiness that she indicated she felt for 40% of her day while the grey cloud denotes sadness she experienced for 10% of her day. Whereas in the picture on the right, the participant used the dimensions of each item to depict how much time a particular emotion was present in their day. The big angry monster is indicative of anger and frustration, which was present for a considerable amount of the day. While in contrast, the less prominent rainbow and colorful starbursts reveal the presence of more limited joyful moments of the day, and the bed indicates some feelings of tiredness. This activity helped participants realize how they experience several different emotions in the same day and how these emotions can co-exist. It's also a reminder of the perpetually changing nature of feelings.

In the following example, a participant described HAP as an opportunity for self-expression. Erin stated: "...using art to express yourself, to explore yourself and learn things about yourself ... [the HAP] opens you to [explore] other ways of thinking."

Participants described the art-based mindfulness activities as opportunities to express emotions that may otherwise have remained suppressed. Through this self-expression participants became increasingly self-aware and were able to deal with feelings in a more direct and effective way.

### **Guiding Future Application**

The concept of teacher presence has been described as an authentic, open, attentive, and flexible awareness of both the self and the collective in context of the learning environment

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(Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). This awareness facilitates one's capacity to respond with patience, consideration, and compassion (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). Teachers who cultivate presence remain open and receptive in their classrooms, and are available to embrace the ebb and flow of their students' changing needs (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). The idea of guiding future application considers participants' use of mindfulness concepts, experiential practice, and delivery of the HAP art activities once post-secondary education is complete and they begin their professional teaching careers. Based on their responses, the students believed they could use the HAP activities in a classroom because of their arts-based nature. For that reason, even supposing they were not experienced mindfulness practitioners, they felt teaching mindfulness concepts by means of this approach was conceivable and even practicable.

In one example, a participant described the use of these methods as a way to create a more welcoming classroom, Alison stated: "...I feel like it's [the HAP] [is] a way for them [future students] to get out [express] their emotions whether negative or positive and I feel like that will make it a warmer [more welcoming] classroom". In another example, Ciara described the use of an adapted version of the Thought Jar in her future classroom, she stated:

... [the Thought] Jar ... I want each kid [of my students] to have a plastic bottle and then I would have beads in the classroom that represented [different] emotions and then they could just go to their bottles whenever they want and put in their beads ... then as the teacher I would want to go through their bottles and see what my kids [students] were feeling.

Ciara went on to explain that she intended to use the individual Thought Jars as a way to gauge how her students were feeling. She described how she would allocate specific bead colours to be representative of different emotions and she would make these beads readily available to her students. Ciara would check the contents of the students Thought Jars weekly and by doing so maintain insight into how they were feeling. These are just a few examples that suggest the



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education students were contemplating viable approaches to implement the HAP activities in their classrooms. Their newly acquired self-awareness and strategies to mitigate negative stressors will be valuable resources these individuals can access for the duration of their professional career. Furthermore, learning mindfulness concepts cultivates teacher presence by increasing self-awareness and fostering self-compassion and empathy. What was evident from all of the group member's responses was that they valued their experience in the program and they were motivated to employ this new knowledge within their professional careers.

### **Increased Self-Understanding**

Arts-based methods allow individuals to access information that might otherwise be difficult to elicit; the information is rich and interesting, even powerful (Coholic, 2016). Participants perceived that the art activities in the HAP played a significant role in supporting their increased self-awareness. In one example, Erin stated: "...using art to express yourself, to explore yourself and learn things about yourself ... [the HAP] opens you to [explore] other ways of thinking."

In another example, Alison described "Paint an Emotion" an activity that invites participants to reflect on their feelings and gain more insight into themselves. She described her experience of the activity as releasing emotions she perceived as negative, and strengthening emotions she considered positive:

The activity we did ... where you paint your emotion ... I really liked that one it makes you really think about what you're feeling that day and how you want to express it and once you get to express it ... if it's negative it almost goes away and if it's positive it almost gets like stronger so it's pretty nice.

In the Paint a Feeling activity participants are invited to paint a picture representing a feeling they have had over the past week. A group discussion follows allowing the group an

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opportunity to talk about their feelings as well as a chance to explore the paintings (Coholic, 2016).



Illustration 8

### Group One “Paint a Feeling”

Alison described genuinely enjoying activities such as Paint a Feeling described above: activities that she felt offered her carte blanche to self-express. These are just a few examples of how participation in the art-based activities provided opportunities for self-expression that led to group members increased self-understanding.

### Fun

The enjoyment created by the use of arts-based methods heightened enjoyment of program participation. An illustration of the pleasure participants experienced engaged in arts-

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based methods, is present in Alison's description of the HAP: "[the HAP] is an arts-based program so the really fun part is that you do get to do a whole bunch of art" ... This definition of the HAP clearly identifies the participants' experience of having fun making art. In another example, Cassandra acknowledges enjoyment in having the opportunity to engage in arts-based methods as a welcome break from her hectic day. She stated:

I felt [the] HAP was a good way for me to take a break from the hecticness ... I would just come here and have fun with a group of people making crafts and once I left it was like, "going back to the real world now".

Cassandra's reflection refers to the HAP as an appreciated escape from the real world. These two examples demonstrate participants' experience of fun as a direct result of engagement in the arts-based activities.

Overall participants acknowledged the benefits of art-based methods for the acquisition of mindfulness concepts, as students described how the fun, engaging art activities made learning mindfulness accessible. Furthermore, they related how the enjoyment from engagement in the art activities played a significant role in their anticipation of attending each week.

Interestingly, the findings from my research mirror the HAP program goals. This can be fully appreciated when comparing the Thematic Map of the Data diagram with the HAP Map (see Illustration 8), which is the conceptual diagram of the program goals. This indicates that the goals of the program which include acquisition of mindfulness skills and concepts, increased self-awareness, self-compassion, and empathy, and fostering individual strengths were largely realized with this group of post-secondary students.

### Summary

In summary, these findings contribute to the current body of literature exploring the delivery of MBIs to university education students. Cogent endorsement of the HAP as a suitable

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and effective intervention for postsecondary students is well illustrated in a reflection made by Ariana during her post-group interview. In the following quote, Ariana acknowledges her preliminary doubt regarding the efficacy of program participation. Conversely, post-group she readily expressed the inaccuracy of her preconceived notions. Ariana talks about how she was concerned that participation in the program would cause stress as it was an addition to her already full agenda:

... at the beginning of the year I was so sure that this group was just going to stress me out more ... I was entirely convinced that ... it was a bad idea, that it wasn't going to work out ... I was proven wrong, because this year I've not had a single moment of ... everything overwhelming me ... just like go down in a hole ... it [the HAP] was pretty much like a reset button ... every week. I was just like ok I have this thing that I can come to and not worry. It was just a nice part of my semester. I wish I could do it again.

Ariana's initial perception that the HAP would contribute to her stress was proven inaccurate, and she expressed that on the contrary, participating in the program during the semester had been beneficial. This example illustrates how students' experiences of participation in an emerging MBI helped mitigate the negative effects of their stress, and offered them practical strategies they could easily transfer into their future classrooms.

### Chapter Four

In this concluding chapter, I provide a brief summary of the current study including a review of the study's purpose, its central findings, and the implications of these findings. I also outline the limitations of the study and provide recommendations for future research.

#### Summary of the Study

As this study illuminated, the emerging adult population within post-secondary institutions face a myriad of potential mental health related concerns. The 2017 report *In It Together* developed by a coalition of the College Student Alliance, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, Colleges Ontario, and the Council of Ontario Universities, recognized the

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necessity to prioritize a proactive approach to address the mental health challenges confronting contemporary post-secondary students. Moreover, the northern Ontario region where this research was conducted faces inequities in healthcare services and health outcomes when compared with the rest of the Province (CMHA, 2014). Northern Ontario faces the highest rates of hospitalization for mental health, while access to mental health services and supports are limited (CMHA, 2014). Therefore, it is relevant to explore possible interventions that could be feasibly offered in our region. My research project offers insights into the impact of delivering a mindfulness-based intervention to a small population of northern Ontario post-secondary students. In this study, we discovered numerous reported benefits of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) that suggest university students experience similar results to the general adult populations which include reduced anxiety and judgment, improved attention and focus, and increased self-awareness, acceptance, wellbeing, self-efficacy, self-regulation, self-compassion, presence, feelings of safety within their class, and improved quality of sleep (Frank, Reibel, Broderick, Cantrell, & Metz, 2013; Emerson et al., 2017; Gockel et al., 2013; Thomas, 2017) with no negative effects.

This study contributes to the current body of literature demonstrating the benefits of MBIs and supports the Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP), as an effective and suitable emergent MBI prevention/promotion strategy for the post-secondary student population. Excitedly, the uniqueness of this emergent approach is the fun and engaging nature of the program that promotes the accessibility of mindfulness. In this regard, the HAP has the potential to be an essential part of the preemptive strategy, recommended in the 2017 *In It Together* report, that emphasizes the need to prioritize increased supports for post-secondary students confronting mental health challenges.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the suitability and benefits of participation in a 12-week arts-based mindfulness group program to foster education students' mindfulness skills, and improve their ability to cope with stressors. This study analyzed new data regarding the use of an emerging MBI with post-secondary students, with an emphasis on the need for evidence based prevention/promotion focused approaches to support emerging adults in post-secondary settings with forethought to initiate these strategies from as early as kindergarten.

The literature review revealed that although there has been some previous investigation into the delivery of MBIs to education students, this research is limited and significant gaps remain. These gaps include understanding how mindfulness interventions may serve to mitigate the negative effects of stress; what prescriptive dosage of formal and/or informal mindfulness is required to achieve maximum benefit, and what approaches may be taken to reduce university students' attrition in an MBI, within a northern Ontario context where persistent inequities in mental health services and outcomes remain. On the basis of these empirical gaps in the literature, I explored the effectiveness and suitability of an emerging MBI with education students. To summarize the outcomes of the analysis I review each question and the associated findings.

### **Main Findings**

#### **1. Does participation in a 12-week mindfulness arts-based group program improve education students' skills in mindfulness, and change their perceptions of the stress they are experiencing?**

The main research question explored two primary aspects (improved mindfulness skills and improved awareness of their relationship with stress) of student's participation in the HAP,

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an emerging arts-based MBI with education students. To begin, the current study findings support the suitability and effectiveness of HAP for education students, based on the consistency of attendance, active engagement with the activities and subsequent discussions about their experiences with the activities. Although a few participants were unable to attend the post group interviews, feedback from those present described the program as constructive and beneficial. It is important to point out that the total number of participants was small to begin with, then three participants did not complete and two were unavailable to attend a post interview. Nonetheless, these findings support the suitability and effectiveness of this program for education students and as such may also, be indicative of the program's potential suitability for the larger university student population. Prior to this research the MBIs implemented with post-secondary students have been more traditional in nature and based largely on the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. HAP uses arts-based methods which may prove more accessible to a larger population.

The College Student Alliance et al. (2017), recommends post-secondary students be recognized as a high priority group, as 75% of mental health disorders begin between 18-24 years of age. This alliance acknowledged that post-secondary institutions require support to meet the mental health needs of their students. They propose universities collaborate with government and the province's mental health system to develop effective solutions, and implement prevention and promotion programs as early as kindergarten with a focus on building resilience (College Student Alliance et al., 2017). The HAP may be considered part of this solution, as it is an effective and viable prevention and promotion intervention option that aims to build resilience in students, which may result in their improved mental health.

### **2. What are their experiences in HAP?**

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After thorough analysis of the data I found three interconnected themes that elucidated students' experiences of program participation. These three central themes are (1) Increased Self Awareness & Mindfulness, (2) Benefits of Group, and (3) Benefits of Arts-Based Methods.

The thematic map of the data generated through the data analysis mirrors the conceptual diagram of the program goals (see illustration 9). This further supports the findings that suggest the effect of participation in the HAP achieved the program goals established by Dr. Coholic and associates in the development of the program.

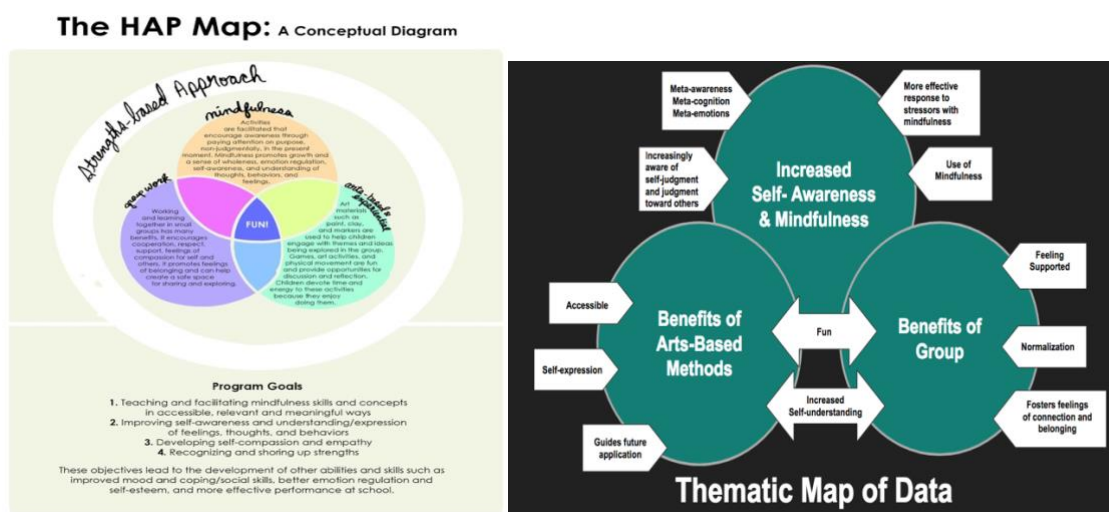


Illustration 9

HAP Map

Thematic Map of Data

Within each of these themes interconnected sub-themes are identified to further illustrate students' experiences of their participation in the HAP.

The theme of Self-Awareness & Mindfulness is comprised of five sub-themes that include meta-emotions, meta-awareness, meta-cognition, increased awareness of judgments, and improved capacity to cope with stressors. The theme Benefits of Group is comprised of five sub-themes that include feeling supported, normalizing, fostering feelings of connection and belonging, increased self-understanding, and fun. Finally, the theme Benefits of Arts-Based



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Methods is comprised of five sub-themes that include arts-based methods helped make mindfulness concepts accessible, offered opportunities for self-expression, guided future application, increased self-understanding, and promoted an enjoyable experience.

These central themes demonstrate the students' experiences of participation in the program which fostered skills to mitigate the negative impacts of stress, cultivated the practice of mindfulness, and provided education students a foundation of knowledge to begin an exploration into the future delivery of holistic arts-based activities in their own classrooms. Furthermore, participants acknowledged the benefits of art-based methods for the acquisition of mindfulness concepts, and students described how their engagement in fun, creative, art activities made learning mindfulness accessible. Participants felt that the art activities in the HAP played an integral role in supporting their increased self-awareness. Moreover, they related how the enjoyment from taking part in art activities contributed to their anticipation of attending group each week. Pleasure from having the opportunity to engage in arts-based methods was described as a welcome break from their regular hectic days. Participation in this emerging MBI helped students mitigate the negative effects of stress, and offered them practical strategies they could easily incorporate into their future teaching activities.

During the second last week of programming, members are invited to collaborate on a poem that describes their experiences in the program. The following is group one's poem which I believe offers further support for the study's three central themes:

We stand connected and supported,  
mindful through time.  
Stirred but not shaken,  
dedicated to our climb.

Paint your emotions,  
put your feelings into word.

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Through truth, trust and openness,  
positive discussion is always heard.

We are passionate about respect,  
and helpful comfort is our goal.  
In our artistic family,  
We let go of harmful control.

Through our non-judging talks,  
in this colourful place.  
We are optimistic and careful,  
to create a welcoming space.

In this world of movement,  
it can be hard to just be.  
We must be attentive to the moments,  
where we just stop, and breathe.

While our dreams are diverse,  
and we will all soon disperse.  
We can walk away knowing, that we are all showing,  
our authenticity, smiles, laughter and equanimity.

As demonstrated in the poem above, participants acknowledged the benefits of a group for support, their feelings of acceptance, connection and belonging, and that the group helped participants with normalization and increased self-understanding through sharing and group inquiry in a fun and safe environment. What was evident from the group members' responses was that they valued their program experience and were motivated to apply their newly acquired knowledge within their professional career.

### **Implications for Teaching and Education Students**

Long before I began my postgraduate studies I felt certain that our current antediluvian education system must undergo a paradigm shift. Holistic education, first introduced to me by Dr. Jack Miller during my teacher training at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

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(OISE), made practical sense to me, as we are whole in our personhood it is essential that we educate the whole and not exclusively our minds. According to Ron Miller (2008),

A holistic approach recognizes that to become a full person, a growing child needs to develop — in addition to intellectual skills — physical, psychological, emotional, interpersonal, moral and spirited potentials. The child is not merely a future citizen or employee in training, but an intricate and delicate web of vital forces and environmental influences (p. 5).

It is this belief that has guided my journey from education to the field of social work where my holistic perspective was validated. In social work graduate studies, I was able to conduct research into the delivery of the holistic philosophy of mindfulness within teacher education. This exploratory study investigated participation benefits for education students who may, as teachers, become mindfulness facilitators with their students. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, researchers suggest that MBIs be delivered by mindfulness practitioners (Crane & Hecht, 2018; Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society, 2017). This is an important consideration when recommending new teachers facilitate mindfulness with their students.

### **Capacity Building**

This research study showed the HAP to be a suitable and effective intervention for post-secondary students on a personal level helping them to manage their stress and build capacities, and strengthen their resilience. When we reflect on the *In It Together* report (College Student Alliance, et al., 2017) we can begin to appreciate the need to direct our attention to collaborating on effective evidence-based strategies to support student's mental health from an early age. As revealed in the literature review, providing mindfulness education to pre-service teachers has the potential to cultivate several benefits such as enhanced emotion regulation, resilience, awareness,

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compassion and patience (Condon, Desbordes, Miller, & DeSteno, 2013; Moss, Hirshberg, Flook, & Graue, 2017).

Possible modes for delivery of the program to this population could be student mental health services such as student life programs. The program could also be offered as an elective course (for education or social work students), or as a non-credit course. Alternatively mindfulness could be infused into compulsory program courses, where courses are being delivered by professors who are practicing mindfulness and have knowledge regarding the practice and concepts of mindfulness.

From a more professional capacity, the education students involved in this research developed a more thorough understanding of the practice through their participation in an MBI, and many indicated interest in exploring opportunities to deliver the concepts they learned within their practice and future classrooms. The program, originally designed for youth, is considered engaging and fun, therefore it could easily be translated into the classroom and may help strengthen the capacities of their students. Consistent with the research, mindfulness facilitators are required to develop, build, and sustain their own daily mindfulness practice. This complimented by adherence to the professional regulatory body that governs teacher's code of ethics, and conduct and competence levels, could be considered suitable criteria to qualify a teacher to deliver mindfulness activities and concepts to their students.

### **Teacher Presence**

Participation in the HAP taught education students about presence and the importance of developing teacher presence for their professional careers. As described in the first chapter of this thesis, teacher presence is state of alert awareness, receptivity and connectedness to the mental, emotional, and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of

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their learning environments, and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step (Rodgers and Raider-Roth, 2006, p. 266). Miller (2007) proposed cultivating a mindfulness practice as an effective method to develop teacher presence. Through adherence to a regular personal practice teachers may cultivate mindfulness skills such as present moment awareness, active listening, non-judgement, and reappraisal before responding (Jennings, Snowberry, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2011). This combined with fostering equanimity facilitates a vital foundation for nurturing student/teacher relationships that stimulate rich profound learning experiences (Moss, et al., 2017). As such, mindfulness in the education curriculum may enhance pre-service teacher education by making them aware of their distracted minds and educating them on how to be present. Offering pre-service teachers training on how to be present in their interactions may provide them with the foundational skills necessary to navigate their complex and changing profession. Mindfulness training for teachers is an education in awareness, an awakening of sorts from trance or mindlessness which we are so often immersed, to bring presence into the classroom. Cultivating teacher's presence is frequently overlooked in the education curriculum even though as suggested earlier in the thesis, it is the teacher's presence that awakens student's curiosity which inspires their learning (Soloway, 2016). However, it is important to recognize that mindfulness may not be universally accepted as it requires a significant amount of commitment which if truly embraced, becomes a lifestyle (Moss, et al., 2017). In this way, a paradigm shift in teaching (which is slowly happening) would be required to facilitate a truly holistic approach to teaching (Moss, et al., 2017). Possible modes for program delivery to teachers could be through Additional Qualification (AQ's) courses or perhaps workshops delivered during board-wide Professional Development (PD) Days.

### **Implications for Social Work Practice**

MBIs such as the HAP could be offered within school settings to support student's mental health. School social workers could co-facilitate the HAP groups with student success teachers, while training teachers to be future facilitators. Additionally, social workers may consider facilitating the HAP for teachers to help them manage their own stress while simultaneously teaching them activities and experiential practices they can deliver in their classrooms.

The study findings also support the use of arts-based methods as an approach to teaching mindfulness concepts and initiating formal practice with emerging adults. This could be translated into social workers facilitating MBIs within post-secondary mental health services settings, as indicated earlier, to mitigate the negative effects of stress and strengthen capacities. Alternatively, the arts-based methods could be applied as a therapeutic approach during individual counselling sessions to facilitate unconventional opportunities for self-expression, awareness, and understanding.

### **Therapeutic Presence**

Therapeutic presence as described by Geller (2013) entails bringing one's whole self to the therapeutic experience (p.209). In order to achieve a therapeutic presence one must remain grounded within one's self while being open and accepting of a harmonious receptivity to the client (Geller, 2013). Practicing mindfulness and learning mindfulness concepts cultivates presence by increasing self-awareness and fostering self-compassion and empathy. The benefits of MBIs have demonstrated greater emotional clarity and improved regulation of negative emotions. As such, mindfulness training may help control impulsive behavior allowing social workers to respond with increased flexibility to stressful situations. Furthermore, mindfulness training fosters distinct experiences with thoughts and emotions by adapting one's relationship to

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them. Instead of avoiding or averting attention away from difficult thoughts and emotions, mindfulness practitioners learn to remain steadfast and present and simply observe them, cultivating spacious awareness (Frankl, 1984). A study conducted by Gockel and Deng (2016) found that an eight-week MBI delivered to master of social work students offered students self-care training that could possibly enhance their capacities to manage the stresses of higher education, while lengthening the duration of their career, and enhancing their professional efficacy. These same students described the training as a way to foster their therapeutic presence (Gockel & Deng, 2016). In another study where social work students participated in a six-week mindfulness course to increase their wellbeing, results showed enhanced wellbeing and improved stress and resiliency (Roulston, Montgomery, Campbell, & Davidson, 2018). Through participation in this MBI, students suggested the practice of mindfulness illuminated why self-care should be prioritized, which is an essential understanding for sustainability in the caring professions (Roulston et al., 2018).

Social workers trained in MBIs can be present with their clients offering a calm, non-judgmental environment and they can offer valuable mindfulness education to both groups and individuals. Consideration of training for social work students in the facilitation of MBIs may serve to enhance their therapeutic repertoire, as well as support the cultivation of a therapeutic presence and offer self-care essentials for the longevity of their professional practice.

### **Adult Client-Service User Populations**

Based on study findings, future research may also explore social workers delivering the HAP to other adult populations, for example, it could be delivered within hospitals, community-based counselling centres, local community centres, and family health teams to name a few examples. Further, study results may inspire the prospect of research into the delivery of the HAP

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curriculum to professions experiencing high rates of stress and its negative effects, for instance Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) with first responders including paramedics, police, firefighters, and child protection workers. The government of Ontario recently introduced presumptive legislation that states first responders' diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are work-related. These indispensable professionals answer emergency calls to illness, accidents, violence or fire and are required to immediately identify and assess situations, and provide appropriate, efficient care to patients and/or victims. Exploring the potential to include capacity building programs that enhance resilience as part of first responders training could help mitigate the negative impacts of stress and possibly reduce the profession's high occurrence of PTSD. As social workers, we are frequently employed in work with individuals suffering from trauma, therefore we are well positioned to deliver these types of interventions. Benefits from participation in the HAP can contribute to mental health. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to her or his community" (WHO, 2014, para.1).

Arts-based methods are holistic and strengths-based, they focus on an individual's strengths and consider people in their wholeness, not separating the mind from the body and spirit. As such they are spiritual in nature, offering an effective outlet for self-expression and differentiated communication. Research participants described the arts-based mindfulness activities as opportunities to express emotions that may otherwise have remained suppressed. These findings support the use of the program for individuals who could benefit from the expression of suppressed emotions.



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### **Arts-Based Methods**

Leonard, Hafford-Letchfield, and Couchman (2016) suggested social work needs to investigate the use of original approaches to achieve inspired solutions. In this way Shenaar-Golan and Walter (2018) explored the implementation of an arts-based approach within the social work curriculum. Results of this evaluative study revealed the course offered students practical skill development that comprised interpreting non-verbal communication and self-expression through art, incorporating art within groups, and utilizing art within the field which cultivated their professional competency as group facilitators (Shenaar-Golan & Walter, 2018).

Some advantages of arts-based methods, include self-expression of difficult emotions and experiences, understanding others' feelings and the potential to initiate change of ingrained deleterious perspectives (Leonard, Hafford-Letchfield, & Couchman, 2016). Furthermore, participation in arts-based activities provide the occasion for individuals to demonstrate their strengths (Kelly & Doherty, 2017).

Arts-based methods is an emergent approach to learning mindfulness that is enjoyable and engaging, and enables individuals to express feelings/thoughts that might otherwise be difficult to elicit; this information is rich and interesting, even powerful (Coholic, 2019). The HAP is an arts-based methods program originally designed for vulnerable children and youth who experienced difficulty being quiet or remaining still for any length of time. This unique approach to learning mindfulness skills and concepts may prove useful for anyone who has trouble paying attention or remaining silent for extended periods of time. Moreover, I would suggest it is an effective, engaging non-intimidating introduction to mindfulness where individuals can gain insight into mindfulness concepts without the commitment of an intensive formal daily practice. As social workers work largely with marginalized populations we may

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consider the HAP to be especially relevant. This approach may contribute to a more natural transition into accessing a deeper more formal mindfulness practice and/or helping process. Additionally, it may serve to make more traditional MBIs increasingly accessible or alternatively it may be enough on its own to provide the foundation for one to cultivate increased presence in their life. Identifying that some client populations struggle with verbal communication, social workers may choose to include arts-based methods in their practice as an alternative, inviting opportunities for creative self-expression (Coholic, 2017).

### **Limitations**

There are some limitations to this study. These include the study's small sample size which limits its generalizability as findings may be specific to these particular participants. Accordingly, some of these findings will be specific to the distinct students. As this research involved a small number of participants, the low statistical power of the analysis compromises the researchers' ability to make an accurate judgment about the true effect of the intervention by way of quantitative analyses. That being said, should this study be replicated with a larger sample of participants, the analysis may yield different findings. Self-selection bias is another potential limitation as the identified population were invited to attend the program. No control group was employed in the study; therefore, another limitation is that it is non-informative on comparative effectiveness.

Another limitation would be the use of self-measures. Despite their potential, self-measures are an imperfect measurement especially with regard to mindfulness (Wong et al., 2018). Consideration should be taken when administering Mindfulness Awareness and Attention Scale (MAAS) to individuals unfamiliar with the concept of mindfulness. This became apparent during the analysis when participants' initial (pre-group) lack of understanding of mindfulness

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was evident and may have resulted in erroneous pre-measure MAAS scores. Moreover, timing of the post-group interviews that were conducted at the end of semester may have been at a time when the students had elevated levels of perceived stress, as assignments were due and final exams pending, as such there may be a question of accuracy with regard to the participant's perceived stress due to the timing of the administration of the post Perceived Stress Scale (PSS).

Despite these limitations, the findings remain consistent with other researchers' work (Lynch et al., 2011; de Bruin et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2018; Kerr, et al., 2017). Results support the use of MBIs with university students and reveal the fun and engaging nature of an emerging arts-based MBI may increase participation, reduce attrition and improve accessibility of mindfulness. These preliminary findings could be further explored by conducting further research studying the delivery of the HAP with university students but including larger sample sizes, a control group, and conducting longitudinal studies.

### **Recommendations**

From these research findings, several recommendations can be made for the future implementation of this arts-based mindfulness program. Since the participants demonstrated a keen desire to explore their experiences of the activities, recommendations to incorporate fewer activities into each session would allow more time for group inquiry and discussion.

Program delivery is another area that could benefit from future consideration. The program timing played a role in attendance especially regarding program conclusion. Sessions could have commenced early in September and concluded by late November or alternatively they could have started mid-October after reading week and extended into January so that the group did not end during a particularly busy and stressful period for participants.

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Perhaps additional data could have been gathered from the participants by way of brief semi-structured interviews at six weeks. As an abundance of data was collected from the one individual interview conducted with Alison, individual pre- and post- group interviews could be considered as an alternative to the group interviews as an option to potentially enhance the collection of rich data. Another possible consideration is to send completed interview transcripts to participants to inquire if the interpretation seems accurate and determine if they'd like to add anything to the data collection. Also, it may have been advantageous to videotape all the group sessions as they were held in the MQRL and the video equipment was available. This supplementary data may have provided additional insight into the development of the group not noticed or evident during program delivery. Finally, initial themes could be sent to participants to be reviewed for their feedback on perceived accuracy of themes.

### **Conclusion**

There have been promising research findings that support the use of mindfulness-based interventions with post-secondary students (Lynch et al., 2011; de Bruin et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2018; Kerr, et al., 2017). This study contributes to social work practice by offering further insight into the suitability and effectiveness of HAP as an effective and suitable MBI for post-secondary students to help mitigate the negative impacts of stress. Moreover, this research initiates the opportunity for dialogue into the value of integrating mindfulness training within the education curriculum or adapting it as prevention/promotion focused intervention led by social work professionals in schools. Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) for university students may be considered a viable option for the prevention of negative effects from stress and for the promotion of mental health. Finally, this research contributes to the growing body of literature exploring MBIs in education and MBIs in a northern Ontario context.

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Results of this investigation into the two groups studied demonstrate that participation in an arts-based mindfulness group program helped mitigate the negative impacts of post-secondary students' stress. Further, program participants reported that they planned to use many of the program activities in their own classrooms with the intention of teaching mindfulness concepts to their future students. Following the study, Dr. Hoi Cheu produced a short video titled Holistic Arts-Based Group Program Extended (click on title to see the video or see: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=incBp8LzX\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=incBp8LzX_o)) that featured some program participants and myself, to illuminate through video storytelling, the effectiveness of HAP for this population. Some of these findings are supported by previous research that suggests delivering mindfulness-based interventions to post-secondary students has many benefits. Also, consistent with existent findings as indicated earlier, is the use of MBIs with education students as a way to educate them in mindfulness concepts. Moreover, their use of mindfulness may support them in their roles as teachers by training their attention to the present so they are the embodiment of mindfulness, leading to the cultivation of teacher presence. All the participants suggested the arts-based approach to learning mindfulness was fun and played an integral role supporting their continued engagement in the program.

These findings speak to the suitability and effectiveness of this emerging approach for post-secondary students. The delivery of this intervention in higher education is recommended with an emphasis on education and health related disciplines. These recommendations are in alignment with research findings that suggest mindfulness-based interventions offer benefits for emerging adults and support recommendations that we find effective ways to foster resilience in our youth starting as early as kindergarten. Additional research exploring the delivery of the HAP to post-secondary students would serve to support these findings and to further determine if

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any program adjustments or modifications would be beneficial for this specific population.

While my interpretation of the results is restricted by my worldview and the small sample size of student participants, given the findings, it seems reasonable to assume future research with a larger sample size would prove advantageous in guiding a more wide-scale implementation of this program with emerging adults within the post-secondary educational environment.

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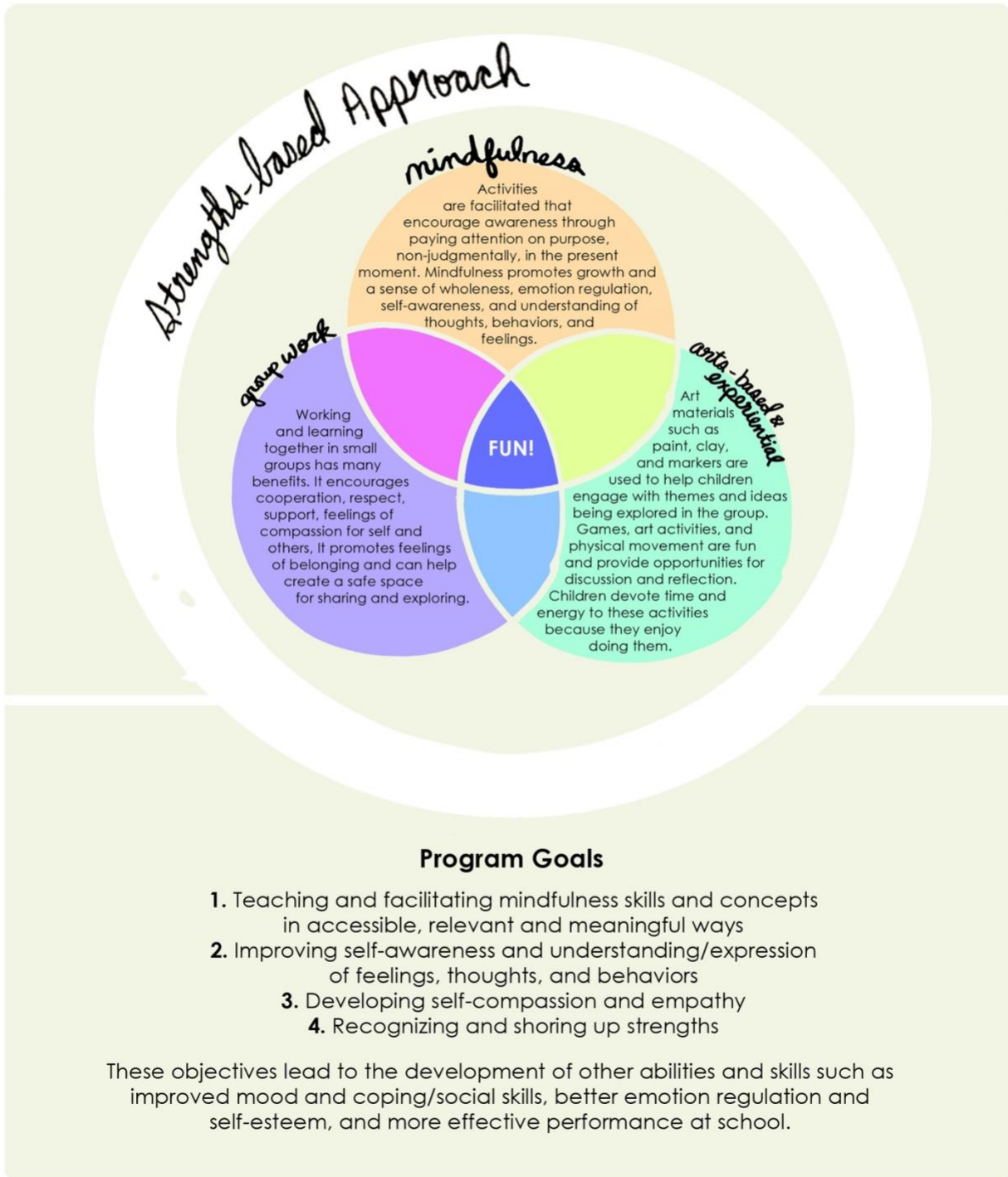
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## Appendices

### Appendix A: HAP conceptual map

# The HAP Map: A Conceptual Diagram



### **Appendix B: Student Information Handout**

#### **Information Pertaining to the Arts-Based Mindfulness Group Program**

Over the past 10 years, mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) have emerged as promising interventions for a variety of challenges such as stress, anxiety, and schooling. Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges by paying attention on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally, to moment-by-moment experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 1994). Mindfulness is a holistic philosophy that encourages us to explore who we are, question our worldview, and foster appreciation for our experiences.

MBIs with young people can help them improve their abilities to pay attention, develop emotion regulation and self-understanding, and build self-compassion. When a child understands her feelings and thoughts, she can make better decisions regarding her emotional expression rather than acting out in response to a trigger. Schools are increasingly interested in incorporating mindfulness-based activities and curriculum into regular classroom teaching because of the benefits they see for their students.

#### **Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP)**

Dr. Diana Coholic (School of social work) and her colleagues developed a 12-week mindfulness program called Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP). HAP is a combination of arts-based methods, mindfulness-based practices and concepts, and social group work. Many children and youth have participated in HAP, which they described as fun and beneficial. Children and their parents reported benefits in emotion regulation, mood, coping and social skills, confidence and self-esteem, empathy, and ability to pay attention and focus.

#### **Potential Benefits for You**

Your participation in HAP will involve fun arts-based group activities that are strengths-based, relevant, and engaging. You will learn about mindfulness, gain proficiencies in managing your own stress, while engaging in activities that you will be able to translate into your work as a teacher.

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### **Resources**

Two short films were made with children who have participated in the HAP program to help to illustrate their experiences. The films can be viewed by clicking on this address or inserting it into your web browser: <http://www.dianacoholic.com/my-work/films/>

We have room for 20 education students to participate in two different groups comprised of 10 participants each. We will compose the groups on a first come first served basis. For more information and to secure a spot in this research project please email Patricia Grynspan at [pgrynspan@laurentian.ca](mailto:pgrynspan@laurentian.ca).

### Appendix C: Email to Education Students

June 9, 2016.

Dear (student name)

I am following up with you regarding your interest in participating in an arts-based mindfulness group for my research, which I presented on in your education class last month.

The Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP) is an evidence-based holistic program that will provide you with the opportunity to learn about mindfulness while engaged in arts-based group activities within a fun and strengths-based environment. Importantly, you will acquire tools to help manage your stress. We hope that you will also gain knowledge of mindfulness concepts and activities that you may then explore offering to your future students to help improve their self-understanding, self-regulation, attention and resilience.

The HAP will be held at Laurentian University in the Multidisciplinary Qualitative Research Laboratory on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of the Fraser Building.

At this time, we are looking to coordinate the **Fall 2016** schedule and we need to determine your interest and availability. The program is forecast to begin in the week of **September 5<sup>th</sup>** and run until the week of **November 28<sup>th</sup>** with the exception of Fall Study Week. We would like to establish which of the following two session times would work best with your schedule:

**Option A** – Tuesday from 1pm – 3pm

**Option B** - Wednesday from 10am – 12pm

If you are still interested in attending, please let me know by June 17<sup>th</sup>, if either date works with your schedule. If neither option works but you are still interested, please let me know that as well.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Patricia Grynspan

BA B.Ed. BSW RSW MSW Candidate

**Appendix D: Thoughts Jar Activity**

# THOUGHTS JAR



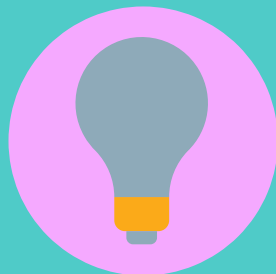
## PURPOSE

Thoughts Jar teaches the concept of mindfulness. It symbolizes how we feel when we have many thoughts and feelings all swirling around in our minds **versus** how we feel when our minds are calmer and more focused (when the objects have settled to the bottom of the jar).



## HOW TO

1. Use a clear glass jar half-filled with water.
2. Take various shaped and coloured beads, which represent thoughts and feelings, and drop them into the jar one by one saying out loud what each bead represents.
3. Everyone can take a turn shaking the jar.



## LEARNING

With a calm mind and self-awareness, we can make better choices and decisions rather than reacting because of a feeling.



## THE EXPERIENCE

"Thoughts Jar lets me show my feelings to my friends and family"

"Thoughts Jar teaches me to wait for my mind to settle before I react"

"Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP)" [www.dianacoholic.com](http://www.dianacoholic.com)

Appendix E: Me as a Tree Activity

# ME AS A TREE



## PURPOSE

Me as a tree helps people symbolize themselves as a tree. This is a good "get to know you" activity.



## HOW TO

1. Participants are asked to draw themselves as a tree.
2. Participants are encouraged to share their tree and how it represents who they are.



## LEARNING

Everyone can draw a tree, but everyone's trees will always be different and unique. This helps to understand how diversity is important.



## THE EXPERIENCE

"Me as a tree shows people that it's okay to be different"

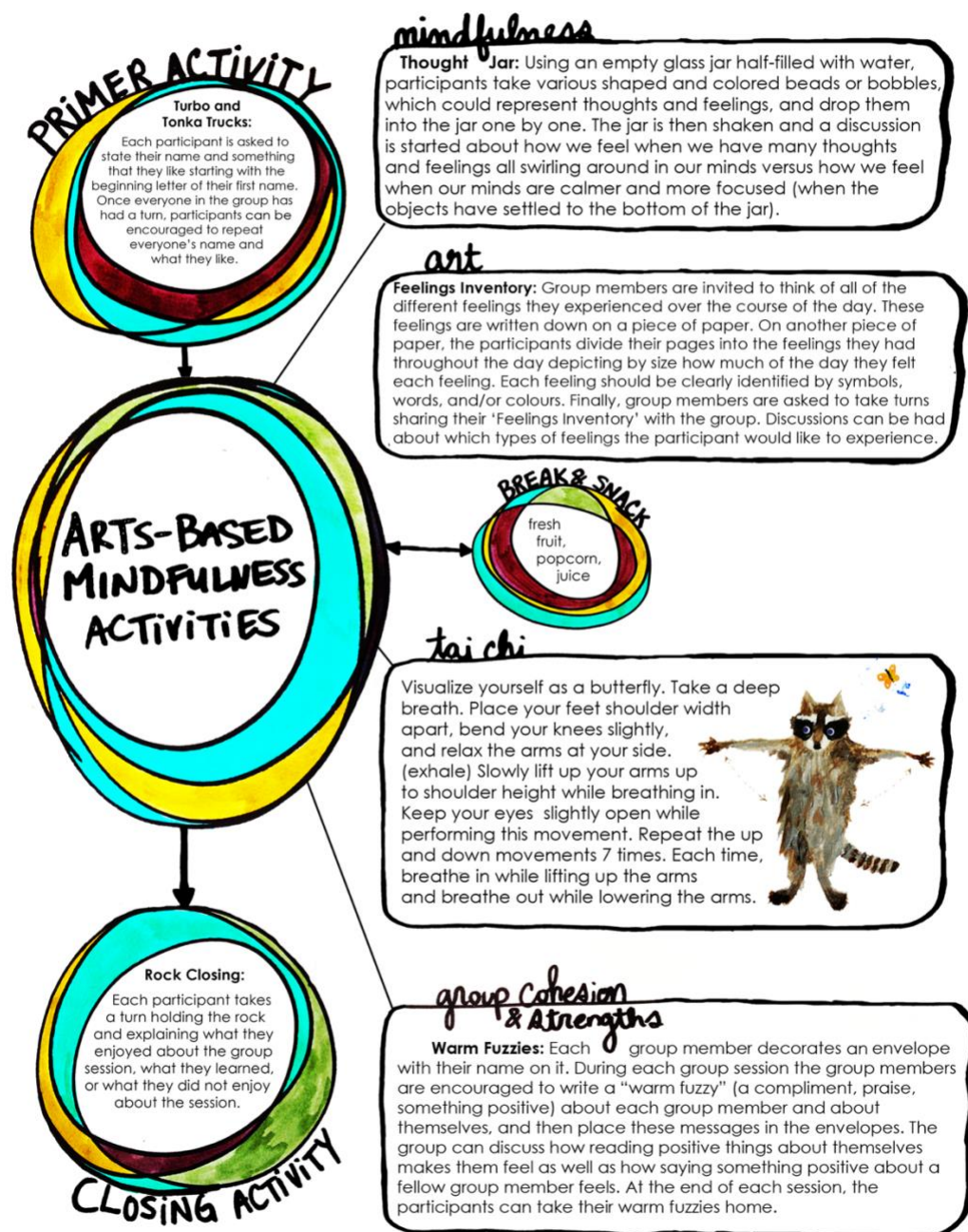
"Me as a tree lets me have fun with who I am"

"Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP)" [www.dianacoholic.com](http://www.dianacoholic.com)

## Appendix F: HAP Session Structure

### HAP Session Structure with Sample Activities

Each 2 hour session consists of 4-8 arts-based mindfulness activities with 1 primer (warm up) activity and 1 closing activity. The following are some examples:



© Dr. Diana Coholic, November 2013. Illustrated by Cait Mitchell

## Appendix G: Perceived Stress Scale

### PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE

#### Sheldon Cohen

The *Perceived Stress Scale* (PSS) is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress. It is a measure of the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful. Items were designed to tap how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded respondents find their lives. The scale also includes a number of direct queries about current levels of experienced stress. The PSS was designed for use in community samples with at least a junior high school education. The items are easy to understand, and the response alternatives are simple to grasp. Moreover, the questions are of a general nature and hence are relatively free of content specific to any subpopulation group. The questions in the PSS ask about feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, respondents are asked how often they felt a certain way.

**Evidence for Validity:** Higher PSS scores were associated with (for example):

- ☐ failure to quit smoking
- ☐ failure among diabetics to control blood sugar levels
- ☐ greater vulnerability to stressful life-event-elicited depressive symptoms
- ☐ more colds

**Health status relationship to PSS:** Cohen et al. (1988) show correlations with PSS and: Stress Measures, Self-

Reported Health and Health Services Measures, Health Behavior Measures, Smoking Status, Help Seeking Behavior.

**Temporal Nature:** Because levels of appraised stress should be influenced by daily hassles, major events, and changes in coping resources, predictive validity of the PSS is expected to fall off rapidly after four to eight weeks.

**Scoring:** PSS scores are obtained by reversing responses (e.g., 0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1 & 4 = 0) to the four positively stated items (items 4, 5, 7, & 8) and then summing across all scale items. A short 4-item scale can be made from questions 2, 4, 5 and 10 of the PSS 10 item scale.

**Norm Groups:** L. Harris Poll gathered information on 2,387 respondents in the U.S.

Norm Table for the PSS 10 item inventory

Category	N	Mean	S.D.
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	926	12.1	5.9
Female	1406	13.7	6.6
<b>Age</b>			
18-29	645	14.2	6.2
30-44	750	13.0	6.2
45-54	285	12.6	6.1
55-64	282	11.9	6.9
65 & older	296	12.0	6.3
<b>Race</b>			
White	1924	12.8	6.2
Hispanic	98	14.0	6.9
Black	176	14.7	7.2
other minority	50	14.1	5.0



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### Perceived Stress Scale

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, you will be asked to indicate by circling how often you felt or thought a certain way.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender (Circle): M F Other \_\_\_\_\_

0 = Never 1 = Almost Never 2 = Sometimes 3 = Fairly Often 4 = Very Often

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?..... 0 1 2 3 4
2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life? ..... 0 1 2 3 4
3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”? ..... 0 1 2 3 4
4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems? ..... 0 1 2 3 4
5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?..... 0 1 2 3 4
6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do? ..... 0 1 2 3 4
7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?..... 0 1 2 3 4
8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?..... 0 1 2 3 4
9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?..... 0 1 2 3 4
10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them? ..... 0 1 2 3 4

Please feel free to use the *Perceived Stress Scale* for your research.

**Mind Garden, Inc.**

info@mindgarden.com

www.mindgarden.com

#### References

The PSS Scale is reprinted with permission of the American Sociological Association, from Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., and Mermelstein, R. (1983). A global measure of perceived stress. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 24, 386-396. Cohen, S. and Williamson, G. Perceived Stress in a Probability Sample of the United States. Spacapan, S. and Oskamp, S. (Eds.) *The Social Psychology of Health*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988.

## Appendix H: Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale

### Mindful Attention Awareness Scale

#### Day-to-Day Experiences

Instructions: Below is a collection of statements about your everyday experience. Using the 1- 6 scales below, please indicate how frequently or infrequently you currently have each experience. Please answer according to what *really reflects* your experience rather than what you think your experience should be. Please treat each item separately from every other item.

1 Almost Always	2 Very Frequently	3 Somewhat Frequently	4 Somewhat Infrequently	5 Very Infrequently	6 Almost Never		
I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I tend to walk quickly to get where I'm going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
It seems I am "running on automatic," without much awareness of what I'm doing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I drive places on 'automatic pilot' and then wonder why I went there.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I find myself doing things without paying attention.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I snack without being aware that I'm eating.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

#### MAAS Scoring

To score the scale, simply compute a mean of the 15 items. Higher scores reflect higher levels of dispositional mindfulness.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <http://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/sites/ppc.sas.upenn.edu/files/mindfulnessscale.pdf>

## **Appendix I: Sample interview questions**

### **Sample interview questions**

**Before participation.** Participants will take part in a semi-structured pre-HAP focus group interview that will explore the following questions: (1) Have you ever heard about mindfulness, and, if so, what do you think it is, and how do you think it could help you? (2) What are some of daily life challenges/stressors at university? How do you cope with these challenges? (3) What do you hope to gain/learn from attending the HAP program?

**After HAP is complete.** Participants will participate in a semi-structured post-HAP focus group interview that will explore the following questions: (1) Did participation in HAP help you deal with your stress? (2) What did you find challenging about participating in HAP? (3) How would you describe HAP? How would you describe mindfulness? (4) How could we improve HAP? (5) What were some of your favourite activities? (6) What did you learn in HAP, which you could apply in your classroom as a teacher? (7) Do you think HAP was helpful for your mental health? If so, how?

## Appendix J: Consent Form

### Consent Form for Education Students

**Study Title:** Investigating the Suitability, Benefits, and Effectiveness of an Arts-Based Mindfulness Group Intervention for Concurrent Education Students

**Student Researcher:** Patricia Grynspan: [pgrynspan@laurentian.ca](mailto:pgrynspan@laurentian.ca)

**Supervisors:** Drs. Diana Coholic and Leigh MacEwan

We are interested to know how helpful our arts-based mindfulness group program is for education students. HAP (Holistic Arts-Based Program) is a strengths-based program to develop mindfulness skills and resilience. The goals of HAP include learning mindfulness, improving self-awareness, developing self-compassion and empathy, and shoring up strengths. If you agree to take part in this program, you will:

- Attend the arts-based group program once a week for twelve weeks where you will take part in 2-hour group sessions.
- Before the program begins we ask that you participate in a 1-hour semi-structured focus group interview to help us determine how mindful you are, how you are managing your stress, and what you hope to gain from participation in the program.
- After the program is completed we ask that you participate in another 1-hour semi-structured focus group interview where you can tell us how mindful you are, what things you liked and/or didn't like about the program, and what you learned that will help you going forward.

We hope that taking part in this program will help you to learn how to effectively manage your stress and provide you with tools to use in your own classroom after graduation.

We will audio-record the two focus group discussions so that we can learn about your experience and how to improve our program.

We want you to know that taking part in the group is your decision and no one is forcing you to be involved. Whether or not you participate will in no way affect your university status. We only want students in the program who really want to be involved. If you decide to be part of the program, and then later change your mind, then you can stop coming at any time but we will keep the data we already collected.

All of the information we collect will remain confidential (that means that only some people like Patricia, and her two supervisors, Drs. Coholic and MacEwan, can see and listen to it) – everything will be locked up at the University. Eventually, this information will be destroyed. We will want other people to know about the groups, however we will never give anyone information so that they would know who you are. For example, we might use a picture of one of your arts-based creations to demonstrate what we do in the group. We would like you to take your arts-based creations home with you, but we would like to photograph some of them for our records.

Agree to photographs of arts-based creations \_\_\_\_\_  
initial

If you have any questions at any time, you can email Patricia at [pgrynspan@laurentian.ca](mailto:pgrynspan@laurentian.ca). If you have any questions about the ethics of this research, you can contact **Dr. Diana Coholic, Director of the**

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**School of Social Work, 705.675.1151 ext. 5053 or the Research Ethics Officer, at Laurentian University Research Office, phone: 705-675-1151 ext. 3213 or 2436 or toll free at 1-800-461-4030; email [ethics@laurentian.ca](mailto:ethics@laurentian.ca).**

By signing this form, you agree to take part in our program and you're letting us know that you understand everything on this form. You will receive a copy of this form that you can keep.

---

Participant's Signature(s):

Date:

## Appendix K: Ethics Approval



## APPROVAL FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Research Ethics Board – Laurentian University

This letter confirms that the research project identified below has successfully passed the ethics review by the Laurentian University Research Ethics Board (REB). Your ethics approval date, other milestone dates, and any special conditions for your project are indicated below.

TYPE OF APPROVAL / New <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> / Modifications to project / Time extension	
<b>Name of Principal Investigator and school/department</b>	Patricia Grynspan, supervisors, Diana Coholic & Leigh MacEwan, School of Social Work
<b>Title of Project</b>	Cultivating Presence - Facilitating an Arts-Based Mindfulness Group with Education Students
<b>REB file number</b>	2016-04-09
<b>Date of original approval of project</b>	May 20, 2016
<b>Date of approval of project modifications or extension (if applicable)</b>	
<b>Final/Interim report due on:</b> (You may request an extension)	May 20, 2017
<b>Conditions placed on project</b>	

During the course of your research, no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment or consent forms may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to the Research Ethics website to complete the appropriate REB form.

All projects must submit a report to REB at least once per year. If involvement with human participants continues for longer than one year (e.g. you have not completed the objectives of the study and have not yet terminated contact with the participants, except for feedback of final results to participants), you must request an extension using the appropriate LU REB form. In all cases, please ensure that your research complies with Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS). Also please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence with the REB office.

Congratulations and best wishes in conducting your research.

Rosanna Langer, PHD, Chair, *Laurentian University Research Ethics Board*

## Appendix M: Support Services List

### Resource List

#### **Counselling & Support Services at Laurentian University**

For crisis by dropping-in at G-7-Student Street, Single Student Residence (SSR) or to make an appointment call (705) 673-6506 during office hours or Email [supportprograms@laurentian.ca](mailto:supportprograms@laurentian.ca).

#### **Student Life Mentor Program at Laurentian University**

Email: [accessmentoring@laurentian.ca](mailto:accessmentoring@laurentian.ca)

Phone #: [705-675-1151](tel:705-675-1151) x3943

Drop in at [G-19 - Student Street, Single Student Residence](#)

#### **Health & Wellness Services at Laurentian University**

Phone #: [705-675-1151](tel:705-675-1151) x1067

Drop in at [G-23 - Student Street, Single Student Residence](#)

#### **Crisis Intervention Services at Health Sciences North**

127 Cedar St, Sudbury

705.675.4760 (24 hour hotline—365 days/year)

Toll free: 1.877.841.1101

Office Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. (no appointment necessary) 7 days per week

#### **Ramsey Lake Health Centre**

41 Ramsey Lake Road, Sudbury - 705.675.4760

If immediate medical care is needed, there is a Crisis Nurse available in the Emergency

Department of Health Sciences North 24h per day. We can meet you there. Please register with the Triage nurse in the Emergency Department to see the Crisis nurse.

#### **Mobile Crisis Team, City of Greater Sudbury**

Our Mobile Crisis Team can visit you in the community at a safe location (City of Greater Sudbury only). Call us to arrange an outreach visit

705.675.4760 (24 hour hotline- 365 days/year)

Toll free: 1.877.841.1101

Hours of Operation:

10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. 7 days a week

(Last dispatch is at 8:30 p.m.)